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The Pitiful Wife

Storm Jameson

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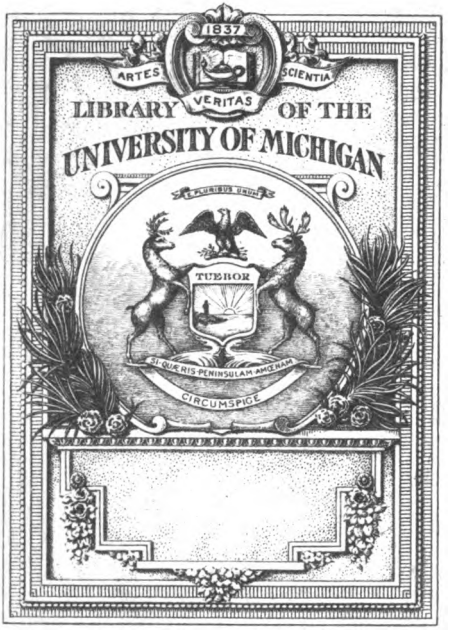

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THE PITIFUL WIFE

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THE PITIFUL WIFE

BY

STORM JAMESON

GROSSET & DUNLAP
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TO

MY MOTHER

A BRAVE, WITTY, AND GENEROUS LADY

THIS BOOK OF THE MOORLAND COUNTRY SHE LOVES

AND TO WHICH SHE BELONGS

IS DEDICATED IN LOVE AND ADMIRATION.

AND TO THANK HER

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"There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave; there are no voices, O Rhodopè! that are not soon mute, however tuneful; there is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last."

LANDOR: *Æsop and Rhodopè.*

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BOOK I

"Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame, wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

—*The General Epistle of Jude.*

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CHAPTER I

TRUDESTHORP stood below the crest of Nethermoor. Sir Nicholas Trude began to build it in 1820, of freestone from the quarry beyond the courtyard. Stretched on either side of the great central hall, the house crouched from under the moor wind. The moorland reached down into its gardens and thrust out vagrant patches of heath and grass into its flung fields. Below the lower lawn the hill-side sloped to the valley, a hundred feet below. There the beck rushed between gorged walls, lichen-grey and dripping from innumerable tiny crevices.

On the other side of the valley the hill rose sharply to the farther moor. Bleaker and wilder than Nethermoor, Blackacres loured over against Trudesthorp. Every window in the house faced it, save only the windows of the kitchens, and they looked out on to the courtyard and the shadow of Nethermoor. Nowhere in the house, save in two rooms that faced a walled garden, was it possible to escape the moors. The water that was pumped up every morning kept a tang of the brackish moor streams. In winter the moor wind sang round the house as with a crying of wild seas and the sharp, high call of peewits, that call as a gull calls, but on a sweeter note and more moving to hear. The feet of men and horses struck sharply on the Roman way. Icicles hung by the eaves, and the maids' shoes slipped on the stone flags of the courtyard when they ran out to fetch in piles of turf from the rimed stacks along the wall. In the cold air of that frozen upland

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Trudesthorp wore a ghostly aspect, as if the pine trees and black moorland had sent up from the barren ground a harsh murmur that straightway froze in stone.

But in summer the house was filled with the moorland air, that bears in its bosom the most subtle of all the wandering airy scents of earth, bitter as death, sharp as a blade edge, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. There is none like it, nor any other that so takes the heart with longing. This all North Riding folk know, and all men born in moorland places. The moor men wander over the earth, avid of new dangers. In all strange lands where they go, the sweet, harsh scent of an English moor whispers with the blood in their veins, and when they die, last of all kindly earth things they remember it, when love weeps unheeded and life itself is little but a memory.

In summer the beck runs thin and shrill. An hour before high noon the mists have barely lifted from the valley, that in the indolent air lies heavy and languid. The South, that warms herself all year at a familiar sun, is less voluptuous than this Northern land when at last she feels a quickening in her veins. Then like the freshet of spring rivers she bursts her bonds. As she was cold now she is burning, as she was virginal now she is passionate. She burns with an ardour passing the easy South. The valleys swoon under their burden of increase. The fruitful mists drop fatness.

A mile downstream from Trudesthorp the beck broadens and the banks draw apart. Cattle stand knee-deep in the slow waters. Meadows break the stretch of pasture, quivering with white blazing marguerites. The moors fall back, and step by step descend until the rough stretches of intake give way to cornfields, and they to soft grassland. The lanes are bordered with high hedges and the gadding vetch. The broad stream turns aside, and running without sound save the murmur of small eddies, passes the first stone-built cottage of the village.

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On a summer morning a child called Jael ran across the lawns of Trudesthorp. Her flying feet left dark prints on the dewy turf. She looked down upon the drifting vapours, where treetops were green islands in an iridescent sea. She looked up to the blue rim of the moors. Her eyes were wide and bright in the sunlight, and her small brown hands rested on the stem of a young birch tree.

The burdenous murmur of bees filled the air: two birds scuffled in a rose bush and a scatter of crimson petals fell across the grass. Suddenly below her in the valley the mists parted and a shaft of sunlight poured down where the beck ran softly into a brown pool. Then the pool was a pool of living light. A fire stirred in its shallows and the waters fell apart into a hundred silver flames that leaped quivering in the burnished air. A tree leaned over the water, so green and shining that it seemed new come from God.

The child's eyes filled with tears. She laid a hand upon her breast: her throat swelled and her small heart laboured, surcharged with joy. The mists swept back. With a rush like the swoop of a wing, Jael vanished behind the house, leaving the garden empty. . . .

Nicholas Trude had built his house to please himself. The rooms, judged by the size of the building, were not many, but they were all very large. The central building he made a vast hall. From floor to roof it measured sixty feet, and had no rooms above it. The floor was oak. The roof was arched like the nave of a cathedral, and the oaken beams rested fanwise on fluted oaken pillars built into the walls, to stand like trees that a cunning hand had moulded in the likeness of stone. The panelling between them was broken, at the height of a man from the ground, by a broad carved frieze. Nathaniel Drew carved it for Nicholas his friend and to the glory of God, being a very pious man and cunning with his hands. He wrought in the

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early summer dawn and in the heat of noon and in the long evenings when the light died slowly over Blackacres and the poignant scent of gorse and heather blew softly through the door. He wrought in the winter until his limbs stiffened and had to be rubbed with Trude's French brandy.

The candles threw strange shadows on the walls, and God was glorified in certain grotesque devils that Nathaniel made in the wavering light. He made more than imps and fat child angels. He made trails of honeysuckle and wild briar, and small long-legged lambs and placid cattle lying in meadows richly tapestried with flowers so that their flanks crushed out the stiff-pricking grasses and creeping plants.

As he worked the unstained oak took on soft changing hues, like stone blurred with dim lichens. The part he wrought first had altered, becoming deeper hued and rounder-seeming, when he made the last small leaf and added to it a network of tiny veins and made the edge delicately toothed and curled because he would not leave the work. Also he wrought fittingly the heads of the pillars where the arches rested on them, and at the foot of each column set a crawling dragon or a crouched cat or other wild beast. These he made with great care as if they lived, although they were hidden in the shadows. He was fifteen years making the frieze, and when it was finished he began to fear that he had sinned in his exceeding pleasure in the work. He even tried to hack it down, but Nicholas heard him, and running in dragged the distraught man to the well in the courtyard, where he soused him to cool his blood for losing his soul.

From the back of the hall a passage led to kitchens and storerooms. On the right a door opened into a room that was just half the length and height of the great hall. This room opened into a second, and that into a third. Three bedrooms were above them leading one into the other. The windows of

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all these rooms faced the lawns and the dark bulk of Blackacres. Their hinder walls rose from the vast courtyard, but Nicholas would have no windows on that side.

From the back of the hall an oaken staircase went up and round to a balustraded landing that looked down upon it. The first of the three bedrooms opened from the landing. In this room stood the marriage bed of the Trudes, of oak inlaid with ivory. It was nine feet each way, with fat child saints set in niches on the headboard, and had a curiously wrought canopy that Nicholas cut away because he disliked it, leaving the two pillars at the foot standing like two strange Byzantine trees.

In the left wall of the great hall—towards the back—a door opened upon a panelled corridor. This ran past the gallery, a long room filled with books, mostly theological, with some of the rarer classics, collected by an earlier Trude that had trafficked with Jesuits, and brought to his new house by Sir Nicholas because he thought they were good furnishing for a gentleman's house. On one wall of the gallery were a few paintings, done by Nathaniel Drew, of a rare and patterned precision. At the end of the corridor a door led into a smaller hall, and this had opening off it two large sitting-rooms, that looked out upon a walled garden. There were also two kitchens that faced the kitchen gardens, and seven bedrooms above reached by a staircase that aped in miniature the staircase in the great hall. This part of Trudesthorp was like a separate house, and came to be used as one in Sir John Trude's day.

The walled garden was made to please Janet Trude, wife to Nicholas. The walls were high enough to shut out all sight of Blackacres, and she filled the garden with cottage flowers, peonies and sweet-william and double stocks, lavender and gillyflowers in their season, and in Spring a host of vagrant daffodils. The fine moss crept over the square flag-stones of

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the path, and at the end of the garden Janet planted a cypress and set in front of it an almond tree, so that in March its miraculous blossom might shine against the black cypress like beauty in the night of the grave.

Nicholas lived in Trudesthorp twenty-six years. After him Richard Trude lived there only seven years and died in 1857, leaving a motherless boy of fifteen to succeed him.

At fifteen John Trude was able to throw men, tried wrestlers and ten years his elder in sinew and skill. He stood six feet four and his shoulders had a bullock's weight behind their drive. At twenty he could throw a yearling bullock by the horns. He was left-handed, which sometimes stood him in good stead. Withal he was light on his feet as a cat, and his huge body moved with ease and a swiftness that aided him more than his great strength. He was a master drinker and poured down his throat a prodigious deal of liquor without any visible change in speech or manner. Ale and spirits he did not drink, but he was immoderately fond of Madeira. He was even-tempered enough, and in anger very cold. A friend that taunted him in a drunken humour had reason to remember both these things. Trude sat silent while the fool babbled, only once lifting his eyes to look at the other, so that the speech stopped midway in his throat and his jaw hung foolishly. But arrack steals wits, and a moment later he was girning on at the silent listener. Then Trude got on his feet. It seemed one movement that lifted him out of the chair, drew back his shoulder blades as a tiger's draw back under the supple skin, and set his great haunches for the spring. The wretch was himself a fine fighter, but he dropped to the blow, with the side of his head broken in from jaw to temple. Trude left him where he fell, to be succoured by a servant who coming in the morning to open the shutters, found him bloody and raving.

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Between Nethermoor and Blackacres was then little traffick. The road that crossed Nethermoor descended to the valley and ran thence to the coast without a sideways glance at Blackacres. Precipitous sheep-tracks, broken by crags, twisted down the gully between them. A stranger, crossing Blackacres to Nethermoor, would have found little to mark a difference between the dwellers in their scattered upland farms. Yet there was between them an ancient mislike that even in the sedate sixties of the nineteenth century set a Blackacres hand at a Nethermoor throat as surely as the two found themselves in company.

In John Trude's twenty-third year the railway was brought down the valley to the coast. It brought softer manners with it, but not at once, for in the very year of its laying there came about the wildest episode of all that long feud—like the leap of a dying fire.

A Nethermoor man crossing Blackacres on a winter night was set upon and beaten so savagely that he only managed to drag himself down into the valley and there died. For five weeks the men of Blackacres kept watch but no vengeance was exacted or yet whispered. They grew careless and at last so insolent that they sent to Trudesthorp to summon the Nethermoor men to a dance, not supposing, so ran the message, that their arms were too feeble to hold a maid or their bellies to hold homebrew, and praying Trude of his well-known courtesy to send that bidding to all Nethermoor farms and houses. Trude returned word that Nethermoor men danced best at home, doubting that they could set no measure which would be pleasant to strangers.

None the less, in the evening, a company of young men crossed Nethermoor to Blackacres by short and perilous paths. The night was intensely cold, with stars pricking the darkness in points of white flame. Like a dead world the moor swung under the remote arc of the sky.

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On the rim of Blackacres Trude stood still. "They dance in Asselby barn," he said sweetly.

The moon came up behind them as they went forward. They skirted the moor until they reached a rough cart-track leading down through Asselby Fields, poor stony land, half reeds and gorse. The barn was below them. They heard the fiddles, and crept forward along the loose stone hedge, lest there should be watchers at the door. There was no watcher. Trude, standing on tiptoe, peered through the narrow window hole. The barn was lit by lanterns swinging from the centre beam. At one side the four fiddlers jerked their arms across the roaring strings. The dance was at its height. Already the young men had removed coats and were wiping the sweat that poured fast down necks and arms. Women's faces were flushed, and they pushed at stray locks and patted furtively hot cheeks and moist palms. The dancers' feet raised a fine dust. It blew in nostrils and throats, so that not a few looked over their shoulders to the long bare table where tankards stood to be filled from the barrels ranged behind it. The decorum that had begun the evening was cracking. Trude saw a red-haired giant clasp his partner with reckless ardour. She drew back and for that was held close and kissed. Trude marked her with a kindly eye. She was long in the limb, small-waisted and deep-bosomed. Her hair was smooth and black as any sloe, and though she lifted her feet like a young colt, her face was cool and fresh. Her mouth parted gravely and she drew down her narrow brows as she danced.

Trude dropped back on his heels. The moonlight shone on his face as he made for the door of the barn. His long mouth widened in an elfin smile. He flung back his great shoulders and laughed softly in his throat.

The door when they tried it was barred with a stout wooden

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bolt. Trude drew back and drove his shoulder at it. It gave way and the Nethermoor men stepped in among the startled dancers. There was a minute's silence, and then Trude cried, "Will ye dance?" and taking two young men by their necks he laid them side by side against the wall. The fight of Asselby barn was begun. Trude and his company were far outnumbered, but the Blackacres men were scattered, and hampered at first by their women, who ran to the sides of the barn and got under their men's feet on the way. Also they were winded and mazed by the heat and the beer they had drunk. But they laid about them doucely, and more than one of the attackers went to the floor with a broken skull. Trude took a man by the ankles, and swinging him round and round, cleared a space about himself, then let the wretch slip, so that he hurtled across the room and fell down by the wall. Four men rushed together upon the laughing giant. The blood leaped gladly in his veins. Blows rained on him: he shook his head like a bull and bent sideways. His left arm swung up and out and felled two of them, a third he took by the throat and flung from him so that he fell and lay with a twisted neck. The fourth gripped him round the body. Blood ran down Trude's face: he wiped it away, set a mighty hand on each side of the grappling man so that his ribs cracked, and wrenching him off dropped him on the ground with the breath squeezed out of his body. Afterwards it seemed to Trude that he fought the whole company of Blackacres. His breath came in gusts from his labouring breast and his heart was ready to burst. His head sang and twice he reeled under a blow and fell sideways on one knee. But ever he got to his feet and came again joyfully, and felt that the fight was going for Nethermoor. He saw one man that fought sweetly on his knees because his shin bones were both broken. Step by step the remnant of

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Blackacres was driven to the wall until not a man remained on his feet save one that leaned against the table and nursed a shattered arm.

Trude looked round the barn. He saw his friends in like case with himself, some that lay on the floor and groaned and some that breathed hard and wiped the blood out of their eyes. Then he laughed again, and his steady, dangerous eye shone yellow under their brows. "A neat measure," said he.

The women still huddled by the wall. A few ran out and knelt by fallen men, but the most kept themselves in a close and watchful company, with hands on bosoms and narrowed eyes. None could say afterwards at what moment it came into the minds of the Nethermoor men to do with the women after the fashion of conquerors. A man took a girl's arm, and she screaming broke from her companions and ran across the littered floor. Then the barn was full of panting men and flying girls. Some got out through the door that swung on one hinge and ran through the bitter night, hearing as they ran the stumbling feet of their pursuers and the shrill cry of wakened moor birds. Trude stood in the middle of the barn and laughed at a man that with a face of rueful amaze defended himself from the drubbing blows of two hefty amazons. They laid upon him fore and aft and belaboured him until he cried Lord ha' mercy. So much more powerful than Venus is the chaste Diana.

Then Trude was aware of a girl that stood sullenly by the wall and seemed waiting for a chance to slip out unseen. Her face was turned from him, and her sloe black hair was as smooth and she as cool as when he saw her through the window. He stepped across the floor and turned her to him. Her face changed not a whit, but he laid his hand against her gown and felt her heart leaping below her breast. She, looking up at him coolly, saw shoulders like a battering ram,

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topped with a lean face and a thatch of matted hair. The great jaw and high cheek-bones were covered with a skin as smooth as her own, discoloured now and grimly besmeared. For all his monstrous size he had a faery look. His childlike smile frightened her and she backed against the wall. Trude gathered her in his huge arms and talked softly against her ear, calling her his little pig's-eye and rubbing his head on her hair as if she had been his jolly mare that carried him every day over Nethermoor. She hammered on him with her fists, and he lifted her in his hands and held her above his head, laughing at her helpless rage. When he set her down a gleam of malice came into his eyes, and he cupped her face in one vast hand to kiss it at more ease. He felt her throat quickening under his hand. "Now, girl, ha' done," he coaxed softly. "Stand over, lass." He stepped back a pace to look at her, and she twisted from his grasp and fled out of the door. He ran through it after her. The cold snatched his breath and set his wounds licking like fire round his head and sides. His feet caught in the roots of the heather and he fell, and got up and ran on and fell again. Wraith-like in the moon-rays she fled before him, and he followed like a cloud following the flying crescent moon. His throat burned and he stumbled dizzily on the edge of a noisy shallow stream, dropping on one knee in the water with his hand clutched firmly in the hem of her gown.

The barn had been fired. A cloud of birds flew from the eaves, twittering and swooping above the smoke. Dragged out in haste, the wounded were being carried to Asselby. Trude stood in the yellow light. A warm exultant happiness ran through his limbs. The pricking of his wounds was gone. He let out a great shout. "Away, Nethermoor." His voice rose over the crackling of wood and the cries of men and women. Nethermoor men came running to him from all sides

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of the blazing barn, and one came out of the blackness beyond the flames. They took up four helpless men and went off, unmolested, along the moor path to the valley. On the edge of the moor they halted and looked back. Asselby barn still flung a torch to the pale sky and across the flames dark figures ran in grotesque frenzy. Trude smiled his joyous smile. "They dance yet," he said and turned his face to home.

There should have been a reckoning for the night's work and would have been if there had not come before it, less than a week after the dancing, a call for help from the coast. Five miles across Blackacres a fishing village hung on the side of the cliff. From its narrow harbour the little fishing fleet had gone out on a day of cold clear weather. Now they lay off the shore in desperate straits, with the wind blowing off the sea and the mouth of the harbour in a fury of white tossed spume and black water. Three times the women and old men had tried to launch the lifeboat and three times failed. The moor people answered the summons readily, hurrying to them over moors that lay already under a weight of snow. Waist-deep in the wild icy waters, the women launched the boat, and Nethermoor pulled side by side with Blackacres, swallowed up in the pit of the waves, and lifted again to catch through the darkness that came on fast a moment's sight of tossing fishing boats. Three journeys they made and brought off all the men, and were dragging the boat up the stone causeway when one came running from the coastguard station with news of a ship below the cliffs.

The wearied men had hardly heard him out when the first rocket went up from the lost ship, a cry out of the darkness. They got them into their places and made out again, but a great wave caught them amidships and turning the boat upside down spilled them out into the waves that clashed above them

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like steel walls. They came ashore with some pain, but the boat was ground to pieces against the sea wall. They considered then to go for the nearest lifeboat, which was three miles farther up the coast, and took with them spades because one man said the cliff road was already blocked in some places. Blocked it was, and for six hours they hacked and hewed their way through walls of snow. The men of the other village put the lifeboat on its carriage and came with them to pull it back over a road in which their feet slipped at every step and the carriage sank to its axle, while the wind blew snow on them like the sharp pricking of sea spray. The sweat poured off them in the ice-bound air, and as they pulled, groaning and stumbling, each man thought to himself that the ship might be already swallowed up and his labour vain.

Light was grey on the sea when they halted the boat within sight of the village. The ship lay in plain view, half a mile from the harbour, her bows wedged between two rocks and the sea washing over her. The crew held together in the bows, and in that sad light saw between them and the shore the cruelest rocks on the north-east coast and raging waters in which no man could hope to live. They strained their eyes to watch the men on the edge of the cliff.

These thought it best to let the lifeboat down the cliff by ropes rather than try again to launch it from below the pier and take it the half-mile along the coast through that maelstrom of treacherous currents and maddened waves. They did this. Gulls screamed round them from the crannies of the cliffs, and the ropes cut their swollen hands. They lowered her into a desolate inlet from which a spit of rock cut off the worser fury of the sea. The men who had themselves been rescued on the night before took her out and did in spite of fearful risks bring off one-half the crew, near dead after that bitter night.

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The boat went out again. It dropped from the eyes of the watchers into the pit of a monstrous wave and there capsizing drowned all its crew.

John Trude remembered through his life the cry that rose from the women when the empty boat rode up on the top of a wave, and one woman that stood dumb and stared at the sea as if it had blinded her. He saw in a fantastic dream her sightless face, the black cliffs behind her, the stooped sky, the bared teeth of rocks and the steel-bright chasm of a wave that reared itself over them and rushed down upon the shore to drench him with icy gusts of spray. A Nethermoor farmer spoke in his ear. "There be nowt ti dea, Sir John," he said. "Us'll gang." They went on that, but Trude remained and stood there alone staring at the sea and waiting for the end. He did not want to stay, but his will was bound and powerless in the clutch of a force that held him, turning his limbs to water, dissolving the flesh from his bones, so that he seemed to lie without sense or motion, blind and unborn in the womb of the sea. He was amazed and afraid, and his heart burned in his breast with a strange dull agony.

During that day five men dropped from the tormented ship. Their broken bodies and the bodies of the life-boatmen came ashore before evening. When night came down the watchers went away, and coming again before dawn saw in its harsh twilight that four men still huddled on the bows. They clung there through the short day, but some time in the third night the sea reached out and took them, and in the morning all were gone.

Trude went back to his house. He passed some days in restless indolence that broke in a black rage, during which he cleared the house of its servants, and riding like a mad thing through the valley set the terrified villagers to bolt themselves in their houses and pray God that he might break his thick neck

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before he did a worse mischief than the dance he made at Asselby. A fortnight later Trudesthorp was shut and he gone, none knew where. It was commonly held that he had shipped before the mast in a proper old windjammer, and in later years a man said he had seen him in Singapore, but from Trude himself was no word during twenty-five years.

He was forty-eight years old when he came back to Trudesthorp, a swart giant of a man, with sinewy forearms no smaller than the thighs of other men and great legs that yet were lithe enough. His brows had thickened, shadowing his deep bright eyes, sunk in a network of wrinkles, and a line ran outwards from the corners of his mouth to his arched nostrils so that even in his sleep his face had a mocking air as if it laughed of itself.

He had the grounds set in order and put four good mares in the stables, and rode to hounds; acknowledged the stiff salutations of his scattered neighbours, and paid his respects to the daughter of a hunting squire. She received him kindly until one day he invited her father to dinner, and after making him senseless-drunk laid him to bed in the Trudesthorp sties, and had his waking attended by insolently courteous grooms.

In his fiftieth year he was riding along the low road beyond the village when he came upon a girl standing in a field of daffodils beside a running stream. The red earth had stained her frock and her feet were sunk in soft loam. As he passed she turned her head to look at him, and he saw her. Like a windflower she swayed against the March wind and had the white beauty of a windflower in her narrow face and wide eyes. He stopped the mare and called. She answered him in a voice that was thin and sweet like a country flute, and afterwards stood beside him with her hands full of yellow Lents and in her blown hair the scent of wet

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woodlands. He rode away, and in two days came again. The field was empty, but he walked across it to the stream and lingered there. She came to him walking among the daffodils, and when she saw him, waited against the bare branches of a hawthorn. He thought that all the air between them was filled with her beauty's silent music. He went to her. Her hands fluttered a little before her throat, but she looked him in the face and took his kisses with a quiet yielding.

She came of tough North Riding stock. A strange tally of accidents had taken from her every relative but one old woman. This haggard creature eyed Trude with disfavour, but put nothing in the way of his marriage. He married the girl in late spring and took her home to Trudesthorp from the church door. She stood in the great hall and looked round her with the serenity she had kept throughout the day, only frowning once when the old woman began a harsh crying.

"Do you like it, Anne?" Trude asked softly.

"Yes," she told him.

"Will you be happy here?"

She gave him a wondering glance. "Why not?"

Disappointed, he said no more, and she left him and went upstairs.

In the evening he stood beside her in the walled garden. She was looking at the almond tree, from which all its blossoms had fallen. He put his arms about her and kissed her with a passion that strove to hide itself. "Anne," he said gently, "Anne. Sweetheart."

She freed herself from his arms. Her face was calm, and at sight of it he felt cold, like a sick man. "Have I hurt you?" he said.

She shook her head and moved towards the house, untouched and passively aloof.

Trude looked after her as she went along the path, swinging

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a little her fine delicate arms. His eyes darkened and his mouth shut close, curving upwards in a taut thin bow. He strode across the flowers and stood beside her in the doorway, bending his face to hers. "Why did you marry me?" he asked.

Her lips moved silently for a moment before she spoke. "You are the only man who wanted me," she answered at last. "He—the other died. I should have married a cousin."

He stared at her and then flung back his head, his huge body shaken with a laughter that stopped as sharply as it started. "Ye must ha' frozen him to his death," he told her, and lifting her in his arms carried her through the gallery, into the central hall and up the staircase. On the landing he halted and held her over the balustrade.

"Shall I let ye go?" he said mockingly. "Thirty feet to the floor, my lass."

She lifted her face, thin and virginal in the vast curve of his arm, like the young moon in a gulf of the sky. He laughed. "Died of a chill," said he. "As I am like to die of a cold bed," and carrying her into the room dropped her on the monstrous bed. When he came to her an hour later he laughed again, but his heart was cold and his eyes dark and unkind.

Some time after their first child was born his horse threw him and he lay unconscious for three days. On the third day he woke and saw his wife's face bent above him. He smiled his puckish smile. "Cheated ye," he said, and closing his eyes slept like a baby.

The accident left him lame of one leg, so that he walked halting and with great pain. The skin of his face sagged below his temples and he carried his wine ill, swelling under the eyes and flushing. A roll of fat came beneath his great jaw, and the muscles of his chest were buried in ripples of

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flesh. He gave way to moods of savagery when no one dare stand before him but his wife who listened with unmoved face while he heaped upon her every shameful word stored in the black recesses of his heart. She was not soft-tempered herself, though that is less than strange, seeing with what manner of man she lived and in what solitary and desolate a fashion.

The child Jael was slender-boned and had quiet eyes like her mother's. Her small face was square-jawed, and her wide mouth when she smiled curved in puckish mirth. Anne Trude beat the child cruelly, but Jael followed at her heels everywhere and would cling round her neck in an abandon of weeping at the first relenting look.

She should have been a Stoic if upbringing had anything to do with such matters. All the year round she got up at the same hour, which in winter was an hour before dawn. She made a mysterious and romantic adventure of this getting up in darkness. The bed was isolated, a tranced island in a cold sea. Came the plunge into the icy air. Gasping and shivering she rushed from the bed, curling her toes up from the draughty floor and balancing on her heels, with cold fingers fumbling at buttons and tapes.

On the morning after her eighth birthday she dressed by candlelight, running across the room to press her nose against the window and peer into the frozen blackness. Her own room was in the left wing, but she had slept that night with her mother, curling her soft body close to Anne's thin back and patting Anne's shoulder in drowsy tenderness. As she dressed she thought lovingly of the three spaniel puppies sleeping in the warm straw of the coach-house. She wanted to sing loudly, but her mother, lying straitly at the far side of that preposterous bed, seemed asleep, and Jael stepped carefully about the floor. As she went out, a gust of wind,

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lifting the carpet in billows from the floor, snatched the door from her grasp and shut it loudly behind her. Jael caught her breath. Trude, standing straddle-legged in the hall, shouted in greeting: she ran down the stairs and was swallowed up in a cavernous embrace. Her joy had fled and her heart beat sickeningly with apprehension.

At breakfast Anne looked at her with flickering eyes. Jael knew that look and waited stolidly for the end. She thought—"I shall be beaten, I shall be beaten."

Beaten she was, and in all her short memory of punishment Jael had never been beaten so ruthlessly. Her childish courage broke and she began to run round the room, crying in a voice that quavered into screaming. "It was the wind." She struck with frantic hands at the descending arm.

Anne dropped the stick. Her face, thin and terrible, swam before the child's eyes. "You would strike me, Jael?" she said at last.

Jael flung herself on the floor. Her breath strangled her poor voice, and she wrung her hands. "No, no," she stammered. "I didn't strike you. Truly I didn't. I'm so sorry, mother, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

"Stop crying," Anne said.

She stood looking down at the small abandoned creature. Through the darkness fast closing round her, she saw that Jael's hands were still baby's hands, dimpled and soft. "You'd better go now," she said. "Go and sit in your room."

Jael spent the morning curled up on her bed. About noon, tired of waiting, she crept stealthily through the house and sat down outside her mother's door. Once she heard Anne move to draw a blind. Afterwards silence, while for an hour she sat, silent herself and motionless. An icy current of air blew round her. She shivered and rubbed stiff fingers. Her child's heart would have lightened despite the cold and her

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aching shoulders. But Jael set teeth into her joys and sorrows and held on like a young stoat. She had no sense at all in such things. Jael happy was joy made visible. Her face burned with a delicate flame and her eyes blazed out the light within. Jael beaten or repulsed tumbled straightway into a pit of grief and became dazed and foolish with grieving—a completely daft little Jael.

She went back to her room and at last fell asleep.

She woke to find Anne Trude beside her bed, and stared with drowsy eyes. The memory of her wickedness rushed upon her and when she saw that her mother looked kindly she sat up in bed and flung herself into Anne's arms. Anne nursed her while Jael held round her neck, folding her thin knees against Anne's breast and pressing kisses on her face and neck and hands.

Anne laid her gently on the bed. "Do you think your mother is very cruel to you?" she asked.

Jael shook her head, looking up with burning humble eyes.

"Will you try to be good now?"

Jael nodded.

Her mother sat still for a long time, moving thin fingers through Jael's hair, while Jael lay trembling, lapped in the delicious languor of repentance and forgiveness. Anne's mind dwelt a little unhappily on Jael's upbringing. She wondered if she were too severe with the small tumultuous creature. Or if she were not severe enough. Jael must be made hard and stolid. What was a little pain now to the pain she would suffer if she grew up so wild and passionate a thing? Anne felt a pang of dislike as she looked at Jael's wide elfin mouth. It had the narrow, sensuous curves of her father's. Jael was a Trude. She had the devil in her. It was the devil that flung her into her transports of joy and grief, and a devil prompted her abandon of love. Anne shrank from

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the clinging arms. She thought, "The Trudes are all mad and all wicked." If John Trude had been scourged in his youth he might have been an easier man.

Almost against her will Anne sighed. At the moment it was not pleasant to think of scourging Jael. The thin soft body lay relaxed in Anne's arms. The dark head drooped against Anne's breast. Jael was tired.

Anne had brought a slice of bread and butter spread with apricot jam and thick cream. Jael ate it in small bites, trying to draw out her happiness. The sharp sweet flavour of the jam made her cheeks ache. She sucked them in, smiling blissfully at Anne and curling a pointed tongue round the edge of the bread where the cream ran slowly down. Anne laughed a little, and when Jael had finished, washed the sticky fingers and small flushed face.

At bedtime Jael stood beside her with ingratiating smiles and soft caressing fingers. "Let me sleep in your bed, darling. I'll lie quite still and keep you ever so nice and warm. I promise I will."

Anne shook her head and smiled. A woman who had that day come from the village smiled also, looking sidewise at Jael: her cheeks fell into long curves like the grave leer of Nathaniel's goats in the frieze above her head. Then Jael knew certainly what for days past she had vaguely surmised. Danger threatened her mother. She thought—"This woman has been told. They are going to do something to her when I'm gone." In an agony of fear she began again to implore Anne, patting her cheek and clinging to her hand. But Anne shut her eyes and the stranger woman smiled her lothly smile.

Jael did not like that this woman should see her anxiety. She laughed loudly and ran away to bed.

"Children are soon weary," Anne murmured. . . .

Anne's son was born in the late afternoon, and Trude rode

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with the tidings to the nearest house, five miles across Nethermoor. He was pleased with the boy and with Anne, and he drank their health in a monstrous tankard of Madeira before he went. At Starcross he drank again with his neighbour, and coming upon two begging gipsies, rare visitors in that dour place, took them back to Trudesthorp. They sat on each side of him at the long monks' table, and with him devoured huge quantities of cold beef and port-ripened Stilton. Then he drank. The wine ran out of his mouth and spilling from the glass ran down the table and soaked the gipsy wenches to their tawny skin. He poured the amber flame down their stretching throats and held a decanter up against the light to show them how it glowed and sparkled with heavenly fire. "The boy shall have it," he said, "as I ha' had it, for blood in my veins and wife to my side. See when I am sober what a loathsome mass of blood and flesh it is—John Trude, fat sinner, cumberer of the earth, great body and dull soul that limps and drags a crippled leg, worms' meat, Trude, black Trude, poor Trude. My soul dwells in a dry place. I ha' a dry and sinewy soul that needs drink for its motions. Trude's drunk now: all's changed and what a change. Trude's glorious, Trude's filled with dreams, Trude's a son of God. I'll reach over the world, take the wind by the beard, climb the sky and show God the body of fat Trude, cupshot old Trude sitting mum-chance down below, while Trude runs his head upon the stars. Up cups, wenches, and drink to Trude who was an archangel in heaven when his body was a bag of old guts on earth! Oh, bravely swallowed. O the brave wine. May the devil fly away with me if ever I eat anything but salt herring and that but to pave my throat for sweeter drinking. O lovely wanton, fire of heaven, red gold, blood of my heart, soul of my body. I love

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ye, my love, my bird, my pretty joy. You and I ha' seen visions together."

A thought stopped his tongue in full spate and he had the gipsy wenches strip and fight before him, while he straddled his chair and shouted lustily. "Who hoop. Have at her. Yoi, have at her. Yoi, stap me. Ge back there, lass, ge back."

Even in that villainy there lurked a metaphysical root, for he named the wenches Justice and Pity, and when Pity with hair and talons starting wildly had vanquished her sister, he swore that was the first time it had happened in a quarrel of the sex.

Thereafter he turned them out upon the frost-bound lawn, and flung their clothes after them, and rolling into a corner of the hall fell sound asleep.

The fight was at its loudest when Anne Trude got out of bed and poked her white face over the railings of the landing. She leaned there for a moment, looking down upon the hall, and seemed watching with a wandering gaze the grotesque leaping shadows of the two women and Trude whooping in the firelight.

The white face withdrew. Anne was back in bed. Hour upon hour she lay there, rigid. What thoughts came to her in those hours, by what dark waters of humiliation she bowed herself, none other could know or knowing tell. Her eyes darkened and her face, that had been white, took on the waxen immobility of death.

At last it seemed the cup was drunk, for she sighed a little and raised herself in listening posture. The house was silent. Slowly she got from her bed again and walked down the stairs and crossed the hall, dark now but for the embers in the two monstrous fire-places. The bolts of the door were

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heavy: twice she tried to draw them and twice sank against the wall with closed eyes and hanging arms. They yielded and she stepped out upon the lawn. Cold, black and bitter that night. The rimed grass crackled under her bare feet. The wind was a knife between her breasts. She reached the walled garden and went through the narrow arched door. Her strength was nearly done, and swaying, she took a few steps and then dropped on her knees and after on her face. The flagged path against her forehead roused her. She raised herself upon her knees and moving first one and then the other got like that some way towards the house. Once she looked towards the window of Jael's room, but so deeply had she sunk herself in wretchedness that the thought of Jael fell across her mind only as a shadow that came and passed.

She had got the death she came out to seek. It pressed on her from the night wind. It struck through her limbs from the icy ground. And when she felt its touch upon her bones she shrank a little. The waters of death were cold and in a lonely place, a land of darkness where the light was as darkness. She would go back from them. Surely there would be a path for her feet. She cried out and her voice returned to her from the void spaces of the air. She fell forward on her hands, and slowly, drawing with each movement a score of painful hurried breaths, she came to the house. "It is but the end of the gallery," she said, and when that was passed and the hall lay before her, said, "It is but across the hall." She reached the staircase but could not lift herself upon the lowest stair. Again and again she tried until the last pulse of strength grew fainter, paused and ceased. Through the waves of pain that rose out of the darkness and swept over her one after one, while she lay beaten and

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supine, she heard the crying of a child. Then came the blackness shutting up her eyes and filling her throat. She sighed once and lay still.

The nurse sought and found her at the foot of the stairs. They carried her up and laid her in the bed and tried all means to bring her alive. She did not die that morning, but never heard Jael's bitter cry, and before evening slipped into the death she counterfeited.

Trude stood by her bed. His eyes burned in the brooding immobility of his face. He stood in silence, and at last, looking round on the weeping women, flung up his arms in a gesture of impatience. "Get out of this," he said. "Oh, for God's sake get out."

When he had cleared the room he fetched warm water and washed Anne's body carefully and wrapped it in a fine gown, laying her hands on her breast and smoothing her dark hair. Then he knelt beside her and began gently to talk to her. "Where are you, dear Anne?" said he. "You are going a long way on your poor feet. I would ha' carried you, Anne. But you were always wildie like and queer. You liked best to be alone. Art alone now, dear Anne? I would ha' come if you had asked me, and then I had lain still and been quiet in a narrow place. My days are past but here sit I in the grave, saying to the dust, My brother, and to the air, Come not near my corruption. O pity me, my wife, for the day when my children will turn from me in loathing and men will abhor me and spit upon me. What did I suck in with my mother's milk and who was my father that had death for his other son? Oh, Anne, I should ha' died between her knees that bare me."

He stooped and lifted her in his arms, went with her down the stairs and through the house. The frightened

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servants stood aside, but he saw none of them, holding Anne's head against his shoulder and talking to her in a caressing voice. He showed her all the rooms and then carried her round the courtyard to see the great beautiful mare in her stall and the litter of tiny pigs. In the walled garden he laid her softly down while he gathered daffodils and brought them to her. "You will not wait for me, my wife. Your soul would fly from mine if we stood together in the hand of God. I shall never see you again. There are no fields of daffodils beyond the grave."

He carried her back and laid her on her bed with daffodils about her. He bent and spoke in her ear. "I'll ha' them leave all doors unlocked for seven days, dear Anne. I'll not shut ye out. If you find it lonely and sorrowful where you're going, come back, sweet soul."

The Trudes were a Roman Catholic family, the only one of their persuasion in the neighbourhood, but careless Trude had promised that Anne's children should remain of her Protestant faith. When the nurse told him the boy ailed and should be christened, he said impatiently—"Then do't, woman, do't."

The vicar came to Trudesthorp through a storm of wind and rain. Dazed with cold and weariness, he stood on the threshold and blinked at the light. A mountain of man came between him and the fire, and advanced with outstretched hand. Vast grotesque shadows attended him across the hall and he walked painfully. He offered the young priest a small glass of canary and pushed him towards the cavernous hearth.

"God bless my soul, Mr. Hender," said he, "you are half-dead." He tugged at the young man's oilskins.

John Hender dropped thankfully into a chair. His host eyed the wellingtons he stretched out to the blaze.

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"You shall have some dry shoes," he said, and shouted for his man.

Despite Hender's protests he found himself with his feet in a pair of Trude's slippers. He was a stripling beside the bulk of Trude, but the slippers fitted him. He smiled.

"They fit," said he.

Trude's wide mouth curved upwards. "I ha' a slender foot," he said complacently, adding slyly, "They pretend in the village to know the devil by the smallness of his boots. Your parishioners take me for no less."

"They exaggerate your powers," John Hender said drily.

Trude gave him a sidewise glance. "How came you, a Cornishman, to this wild place?" said he.

"No wilder than Cornwall, sir, though not so magical."

Trude nodded at him. "I know your magic. I was in Falmouth once, and near bewitched by a pretty maid. I gave her a florin for her services, for which she was vastly grateful and said I was no Cornishman."

Hender sat in silence, frowning at the rushing flames. At last he stirred impatiently in his chair. "Where is your son?" he asked abruptly. "The boy I came for."

"They bring him, they bring him."

Hender's eyes shifted from the flames to the frieze along the panelled wall. His mouth, that had been hard shut, relaxed into involuntary softness. He had a deep and ever-welling love for all small weak things, and just behind him where he sat Nathaniel Drew had made a very young lamb that tottered on its legs beside a sprawling cherub with rollicking limbs.

"You like my frieze," Trude said politely. "The man who did it was mad and an artist. He had sons and grandsons who were neither mad nor artists. His great-grandson rode to my door last night and would ha' had my blood for shoot-

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ing his dog. There were tears in his eyes, I'll swear, but they dried before he went. He's maybe ten and ah squared up to me with the hate of a hundred devils in him. He called me a devil, a damned devil." Trude chuckled. "One of your flock, Hender."

"You shot his dog," the priest jerked out.

The nurse was coming slowly down the stairs. Hender stood up, and Trude, dragging his huge body out of his chair, limped across the room.

The nurse smiled nervously into Hender's face. "We prepared for you, sir."

Afterwards Hender could remember nothing that had happened between the nurse's words and Trude's laughter. He must have asked Trude for his son's name. The man's yellow eyes twinkled in their great pits, and the bushy hairs of his nostrils quivered with a stifled laughter that rumbled on in some remote corner of his body. Then he had said softly, bending over the priest, "The boy will be called Judas," and Hender had cried aloud in protest.

Trude's laughter broke out. It echoed about the arches of the roof and rolled over Hender in waves of sound. Deafened and shaken, the young man, that was no coward, found his knees trembling under him. He leaned against the table and looked at the quivering giant, who rocked and held his sides and choked with his mirth.

When Trude stepped towards him, Hender remembered village talk of his cruelty. Hot and angry, he stiffened himself to meet the man. The powers of darkness might be round him, but he swore to hit Trude once in the middle of his smiling mouth. He cried out again in the darkening hall. "Stop laughing, will you?"

Trude stopped. His voice was gentle and courteous when he spoke.

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"I'm an old man," he said, "a sick man, Hender. Old men have whims. The name is an ancient name." He shook a finger like a faggot in Hender's face. "If the child should die to-night, unchristened, whose will be the blame? Not mine. You'll ha' your Bishop against you, Hender."

Bewildered, the young priest looked from Trude's malicious eyes to the nurse's pale face. If the man had used force he could have withstood it. This gentle speech confused him. The room was given over to evil. Faces of devils leaned out of the frieze. He prayed for guidance. Trude's persuasive reasonable voice murmured on like a distant sea. The child cried feebly, and looking at its face and pinched nostrils he thought to himself it was liker than not to die before morning.

"I'll baptize the child," he said at last, and asking the name again, poured water upon him and baptized him. He said the prayer that should follow and left the house straightway, returning no answer to Trude's thanks.

Outside the storm beat him to his knees. He got up and staggered and got up again. The whirling snowflakes took on strange shapes. He was pricked with spears. The voices of the wind mocked him and he tried to run from his tormenters.

He was five hours reaching the vicarage. His young wife stood in the doorway and ran down the path to tug at him with urgent hands, breathless, her dress beaten about her by the wind. He clung to her, and inside the warm room fell on his knees beside her with his head in her lap and cried. He was exhausted and terribly humiliated. He had fought with Apollyon and been defeated. He sobbed with weariness and shame.

She heard his story with a face that paled for all her courage. But the arm that held him did not tremble and her

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voice kept a tender certainty. She told him he did right, and for a long time sat turning over in her mind how, if the boy lived, they would both help him. She came out of her silence to say—"Perhaps God meant a child's soul to sanctify the name of that poor man."

He looked up at her beloved face. "Poor man?" he asked, and when she told him compassionately—"Judas"—caught her to him again with a cry half surprise and half adoring love.

Up at Trudesthorp, Trude's heir slept soundly, and gentle sleep came to Jael, too, where she lay crying softly for her dead mother.

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CHAPTER II

TRUDESTHORP changed during the next five years. How much it had changed John Hender learned one morning in May, when he walked up from the valley on an errand of his own making. He passed through the lower fields and noted the broken fences and the ravages of gorse and thistle. He crossed the upper lawn and saw how in its neglected spaces daisy and dandelion roots had covered all. The door of the great hall stood open, but the hall was empty. He stood in the middle of the floor and shouted. His voice echoed from rafter and gallery. He shouted again and the echoes rolled round and back. In a corner of the fire-place two wolf-hounds got to their feet. They were chained to a huge staple driven into the panelled wall and in their frantic efforts to get at him tugged and slavered and leaped. The place smelled of decay and dust. Hender pulled at a bell-rope: it came away in his hand, bringing down upon him a choking cloud of cobwebs and rattle of grit.

On a swift impulse he walked across the hall and pushed open the door of the first room on the right. Here on a litter of straw were setter pups, and against the walls a pile of wrecked and dusty furniture. He strode through the desolation of the second room to the third, where the door stood open on to the lawn and an ancient mare was stabled in some comfort. When he walked back a flutter of wings in the middle room halted him, and he saw that its shadowy recesses

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had become two pigeon cotes. He watched the birds walking with jerking heads about the tatters of the carpet.

He stood uncertain in the hall, thinking it useless to go farther and reluctant to leave the house with his task undone. Abruptly he became aware that on a vast bed under the arch of the stairway Trude lay and watched him. For a moment or two John Hender stared across the space between them, bewildered, wondering what trick of light and shadow had hidden the bed from him when he stood there before. The old man was propped against the head of the bed. A bed-gown, falling away at the neck, disclosed this throat, brown, gnarled, and knotted like the trunk of a tree. His face was graven with innumerable lines, and vast and swart. He sat motionless with his huge hands folded in front of him and stared up at Hender from the pits of his eyes.

Hender spoke. "I beg your pardon," he began. "I did not know. I came in unasked."

"You did," Trude said. "You ha' the invincible impertinence of your breed. I ha'na asked you to pray at my bedside nor to visit my house. You may go as you came, sir, with what haste you like."

"Sir John," Hender said quickly, "I have apologized for the manner of my entry. I could not make your servants hear me."

Trude raised his voice in a great shout. There was a faint scurrying and scratching behind the door of the passage that led to the kitchens. It opened, and an old woman entered at a nervous shuffling run. She halted beside the bed, looking at Trude. Her cheeks were pink and her chin long and pointed. She had wild white hair and her tiny body was wrapped in folds on folds of brown brocade, torn, stained and blackened. Trude waved his hand at her. "My servants, Mr. Hender," he said. The old witch tried to curtsey to

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Hender, tripped over her gown and fell on her knees. Trude roared with laughter. The priest hurried to help her, but she got up with astonishing agility and skipped away from him to the foot of the bed, where she clung to a bedpost, peeping round it with a kind of terror-stricken coquetry.

"Martha Sheldon," Trude said, "whom do you serve?"

Martha drew her face back round the bedpost. "My master," said she.

"Who is your master?"

"The devil."

"And who is the devil?"

"You are."

Martha had the air of repeating a familiar lesson, and when Trude laughed again, she wagged her head delightedly and capered a little, bending her neck round to look at Hender and making an almost soundless chuckle in her scrawny throat.

The hot blood rushed to Hender's head. "Sir," he said, "do not ask me to listen to this blasphemous folly——"

Trude lifted himself in the bed. "Who asked you here to listen to me?" he retorted. "You come uninvited and remain to insult me before my servants. Damme, sir, you amaze me."

Hender was sickeningly conscious of failure. He groaned inwardly at his folly. "God forgive me," he thought, "I am not fit to rebuke any man that cannot guard my own tongue."

"I came to speak of the education of your children," he said slowly.

"A thousand thanks," Trude drawled. "You move me. It grieves me to reject your offices. But when I see fit to consider the education of my children I shall not entrust them to an unmannerly priest. Will ye go, sir?"

After a moment's bitter hesitation Hender went. At the turn of the moor road he met the squire's wife of Starcross.

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She reined in her raw-boned bay and spoke to him. Her tanned and seamed face was long and heavy in the jaw. She was oddly like the horse she rode, and her eyes were brown and kind. She half closed them as she listened to Hender's story. "I was the wrong person to go," he said ruefully. "The man irks me so that I lose both my senses and my charity."

Mrs. Bellber nodded. "I saw the girl yesterday," she said thoughtfully. "She was riding astride in a cotton gown with her black hair loose on her shoulders. She's as thin as a rake and has a white skin. Trude bought the pony two months ago, unbroken and wild as the devil. I dunno who broke it for her, unless she managed it for herself. I'm told there's no one on the place but two women."

"I saw one of them," Hender said.

Mrs. Bellber looked at him. "You'd see Martha. She's Trude's own servant. The other's better. She came to me once when the boy was ill."

"The boy——" Hender began painfully.

"Jude."

Mrs. Bellber drew the reins through her fingers. "I'll see Trude for you," she added. "You'd take them with my girl, I suppose. Trude'll pay you nothing, but Bellber will see to that if I speak to him. I'd be glad to do ut. If you could have seen that girl comin' down the hill behind Starcross. Gad, I thought pony and girl would roll down together. The pony was kicking sparks off the flints and dodging round gorse bushes like a circus hoss. I ran out shouting an' the girl waved her hand and said—'Is this your field?' 'It'll be your grave if you come down it like that,' I told her. I took her in and gave her currant wine and cake. She walked round the room touching things with one finger. 'You have a lovely,

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house,' she said, and lifted a face like a flower. Mary, poor lass, looked a dairy wench beside her."

"Mary's a rare fine girl," Hender said, and laughed. "And I want none of your money. I owe the boy a debt, and I'll thank you if you give me the chance to pay but a little of it. I doubt Trude will not listen to you."

Mrs. Bellber rode off. "He'll listen to me," she said grimly. "I care nothing for the old devil and he knows ut."

She went straight to Trudesthorp. Leaving her horse in the courtyard she walked through the kitchens into the hall. Trude was up, huddled in his bed-gown over the fire. He turned round at her entry and made no move to rise. She walked across and pulled a chair for herself from the table. He looked up at her from under his eyebrows, and his smile mocked her.

"You'll forgive my attire," he said softly. "It grieves me to receive a lady in my bed-gown, but my visitors do not stand on ceremony with me. I ha' had a priest here this morning who found me in my bed and pulled my beard. I had rather it had been you."

Mrs. Bellber regarded him dourly. "You're a spiteful old man," she said, "and I did not come for the pleasure of seeing you."

"My visitors are always rude to me," Trude said plaintively. "Damme if I know why they come."

Mrs. Bellber spoke directly. "I came to tell you that I'd have Jude and Jael educated with my girl—if you'll allow it."

"And what if I won't?" he asked.

She looked him in the face. "I never knew you refuse anything you could have for nothing, John Trude."

Trude chuckled and then choked alarmingly. She waited until he had ceased to heave and groan.

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"May the devil fly away with me," he gasped, "if I be not fat within and fat without like a bladder of lard. I ha' hardly breath enough to speak, and there you sit talking as if your lungs were as stout as your gowk of a husband."

"You'd be better if you had less breath to drink," she retorted.

"What else would I do?" he shouted. "Answer me that, y'old hussy. What else would I do?"

"Mend your fences and have your daughter brought up a decent girl. She rides the country like a crazy wench."

Trude laughed softly. "Can ride," he said. "Jael can ride." He choked again, rolling and groaning in his chair, with a heaving of great shoulders and bellowing of vast cheeks.

"Have your own way," he said at last. "Take the girl and the boy, too. You'll be the death of me else. And get out. You ha' a dreadful face. I had rather sit opposite my poor rheumy mare. Felicitate Bellber for me."

She had got to the door when he called her back. She came and looked down at him with twitching mouth.

"God's teeth, the woman laughs at me," he grumbled. "How d'ye know I wunna break my word?"

"You never did it yet," she told him. "Jude and Jael will ride down to the vicarage with my girl and her groom. And I'll buy Jael clothes."

"Then ye'll pay for them yourself," he shouted after her.

She waved her crop at him and was gone.

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CHAPTER III

UNTIL Jude was a year old a woman from the village had attended the children. She died suddenly of a fever, and Trude made an unexpected move. He had spoken, on a journey in the west country, with a woman whose son had died, and the memory of her stricken face and soft voice had remained with him. He resolved capriciously to get her for his children. He journeyed down to Falmouth and amazingly found her and brought her back to Trudesthorp.

This was the last time Trude manifested the least interest in his children. He appeared to forget their existence. Trudesthorp went from bad to worse. Frightened servants, bearing tales which the country was loth to credit and the villagers credited in full, fled from the house and were not replaced. The bailiff left, with two years' salary unpaid, and with him went the last pretence at order and rule.

Rents lapsed, except those of some more scrupulous of the tenants. Cottages fell into despair and the land round Trudesthorp became a desolation of rank grass and gorse. Trude sat in his vast hall like a monstrous maggot spreading decay. The bulk of his flesh grew and grew. He did not care to move from the hall and had his bed carried there. His face, that even in his blackest moods, had worn an air of puckish fantasy, changed after Anne's death, until it seemed in some strange sort a malicious gesture of the earth on which he crept.

The day came when, calling for his body servant, no one

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answered. He shouted, cursing and roaring, until he saw where a wizened fantastic creature drifted like a blown leaf across the hall. He stared at the absurdity of pink cheeks and limbs bent and twisted with age.

"What is't?" he said.

The old woman smiled a cavernous smile, and told him her name.

"Where is my man?"

"Gone."

"The others, then?"

Martha tittered. "All gone," she said, and rocked herself on her feet. "All gone, all gone."

"Why have you stayed?"

"Poor Martha had nowhere to go," she murmured plaintively.

"Then fetch me my clothes, damme."

Martha fetched them. She remained in the empty house, dwelling in some remote and odorous corner of the kitchens, bringing Trude his drink, sitting up o' nights to drink and cackle with him.

Trude paid her no wages and she asked for none. When her clothes no longer covered her she took down a heavy brocaded curtain from one of the disused rooms and wrapped it grotesquely round her limbs. Mistrustful as a cat, she sewed into its folds all her personal treasures—a magpie hoard—and the approach of a stranger sent her scuttling for cover, jingling as she ran. She was the fearfullest of wretches, hardly venturing beyond the hall and the courtyard, but neither fear nor distrust were stronger than the curiosity which drove her to haunt the passage leading to the left wing of the house. She would watch hours for a glimpse of the children, spying on their every movement. They became used to the abrupt emergence of her face from behind chairs and round odd

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corners. She appeared to them a sort of familiar imp, belonging to the unexplored regions of the house. Once Jude came upon her holding to the doorpost of his room with her neck craned across the doorway. When she did not move to let him through he pushed her face indifferently aside, and half an hour later looking up and seeing it still there threw a shoe at it. It disappeared with a jerk and he shut the door hastily before it could return.

She had a craving for sugar and purloined the children's sweets from every hiding-place they devised. Even this unpleasant habit they did not find queer: they took it for granted as they took her sprite-like comings and goings about their path, and made a sporting hazard of their losses.

They would have fared poorly enough but for the Cornishwoman. Theodocia Trewin had the sallow skin, sunken eyes and moody persistence of her race. Long before Trude's debauchery had cleared the house she withdrew with her charges to the left wing. Once a month, scolding and wheedling, she extorted from Trude money for a bare living. She kept two Jersey cows. She also kept hens with a kind of passionate solicitude and sold them and their eggs. She was the only link between Trudesthorp and the village: in her harsh singing voice she spoke a curious mixture of dialects, scolding Jude almost ceaselessly to conceal from him her measureless adoration. She would descend upon him with a rush of angry words and shake him furiously for an imaginary fault. For the most part he remained entirely placid under her violence: on the occasion when he retorted the outrageous quarrel lasted until Jude flung himself into her arms with kisses and endearments. She rocked him and crooned over him, and a moment later was upbraiding him with redoubled violence.

Left much alone, the two children wandered over the coun-

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try-side. Hardly knowing why, they shunned the village and the curious gaze of its inhabitants. Jael could read, and when no better thing offered, she read aloud from the only books they had—a torn and dog-eared Chaucer and a rare Malory, snatched from the dusty treasure ground of the gallery before Theodocia set it out of bounds, locked the door and lost the key. But these were food enough even for Jael's avid mind, and they had too a manuscript book written in Anne's fine hand, which Jael called "Anne's poems," and believed that her mother had made.

On the morning after Mrs. Bellber's visit to Trudesthorp Jude got up very early and looked out of his window. He saw Theodocia chasing one of her birds and woke Jael to tell her that there would be chicken for dinner. There was porridge for breakfast, however, and Jude, detesting porridge, tried to make it tolerable by ploughing channels through it for the milk and floating crumbs down the streams. Theodocia shook him until he choked and shook him again for choking.

"All right," Jude told her sullenly, "I saw 'ee rowing on for half an hour with that old hen. Why can't 'ee kill en praper?" Theodocia rushed at him: he dived for safety and fled through the door. A little later Jael followed with a pocketful of buttered scones which Jude ate contentedly in the kitchen garden. "I think I should be good," she said carefully.

"I am good," Jude said, and took a raspberry cane to make a bow. Jael pointed arrows, and stalking Theodocia's pigs, they crept across the courtyard. Jude saw Martha's head jutting from an empty tub. With a sudden spurt of wrath he let fly at her. Her head disappeared. The arrow hit the tub, and Martha, lurching heavily inside it, set it rolling down the yard. It rolled, with Martha yelling like a fury, across the cobbled slope, and hitting the smallest weakest pig,

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killed it on the spot. The air was filled with Martha's groans and Theodocia's lament. "Oh, the pretty pig, the pretty pig," she murmured, and a tear fell on the small pink corpse. "I had but just fed 'ee and seen 'ee full as a egg and happy as a duck. And now to see 'ee dead bevore my eyes."

Unnerved by her distress, Jude crept nearer. "I'm so sorry, Doxie," he said. She whirled round, tore his bow from him and called the heavens to witness that Satan had marked the boy for his own and would tear him limb from limb, probably that very night. Jude listened resentfully.

"I said I was sorry," he repeated.

Grief and anger had cracked Theodocia's voice. "Get me a cup," she demanded. "I want a drink."

Jude moved slowly away. "I'll get 'ee an old cup," he said scornfully. "I'd get it twice as quick if I thought you'd choke yourself with it."

"Nasty spitevul little toad," Theodocia croaked.

The morning so ill begun drew on in wrath until it ended in Jude's confusion. He was locked in his bedroom with ears smarting and heart bursting with sorrow and rage. He pressed his face against the window and a gush of tears swept away the poor remnants of his defiance.

Jael wandered round the lawn. In the narrow path between two overgrown thickets she came suddenly upon a boy crouching on the grass. He leaped to his feet and they stood gazing at each other. Jael saw a tall lithe boy with brown hair, disordered by the wind. His eyes were narrow, curiously tilted and very bright. He had an elfin air. He stood poised like a wild thing in the narrow path: between them, almost across her feet, lay a sporting rifle. She looked from it to him.

The boy saw a thin child in a shabby frock. Her bare feet were brown and very slender. Between the shadowy curtains

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of her hair she looked shyly. The boy caught his breath. He was an artist, though as yet he hardly acknowledged it, but it was not the artist in his blood that caught fire and flamed into a tremulous ecstasy. He saw that her cheeks were thin, and pale with the fabulous pallor of windflowers. He saw the triumphant curve of her mouth. He lifted eyes to the shadowed depths of hers and saw the lashes flung up to brows too level for perfection. Suddenly he adored their imperfection: a warmth like tears burned behind his eyes: his temples throbbed and a queer pain took him by the throat. So slight, so heartbreakingly slight and young. He saw her cheeks burn into radiance and did not know that they had caught fire at his own.

Jael broke the silence. "What do you want?" she said. A branch of blossom fell from her hand and he crushed it under the sudden movement of his foot.

"I came," he said, and stammered, "I came to kill old Trude. He—he *murdered* my dog. So I've come to challenge him and kill him."

"Oh, I shouldn't do that," Trude's daughter said calmly.

"Why not?" the boy demanded.

Jael temporized. "He might kill *you*."

He laughed, straightening his five feet of boyhood. Innocently wise, Jael veiled the admiration in her eyes. Their downward glance fell on the crushed blossoms. "Oh," she cried, and stooped to pick them up.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry." The boy blushed furiously and bent his head. "My cursed feet. They're so large."

"I don't think they're very large," Jael said, and tossed the branch away. Strangely, the gesture gave him back his birthright of unselfconscious grace. He smiled down upon her.

"I'm Richmond Drew. My great-grandfather carved the

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frieze in Trudesthorp hall." His face darkened. "Where that old devil sits and laughs at me."

"I expect he's forgotten all about you."

The boy bent to pick up his gun. "I'll soon remind him," he said grimly. He moved off down the path. Jael watched him go. At the end of the path he stopped, seemed to hesitate, and then turning, strode back and stood beside her. "Look here," he said quickly, "will you wait for me? When it's all over, I'll come back here. Will you?"

Jael lifted her amazing eyes. "Yes," she said.

The boy persisted. "You'll not get frightened? And run away?"

Jael smiled suddenly, and smiling, her face became that of the wanton heartless Puck.

"I live here," she said.

Richmond looked. Jael laughed, and he saw her white, lifted throat, and felt again his heart burning within him, and did not know his pain for what it was—the ancient, sharp and ever-venomed grief of man for beauty that must die.

She spoke, breaking the spell that lay upon him. "I'm Jael Trude."

The dreams that beat about his half-awakened ears were gone. He never even heard the flutter of their wings. He threw down his gun again and laughed until the thicket rang, while Jael listened in hurt surprise.

"That's over," he said at last. "Of course, I can't kill your father. Too ridiculous, my dear. We must think of something else to do."

But Jael was regarding him with unmistakable scorn. She spoke in a small voice. "You're very changeable."

Richmond stared and went off again into peal after peal of laughter. "Mercy," he gasped, "I believe you're dis-

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appointed. Did you want me to kill your father?" His voice changed suddenly. "Oh, no, my dear. No, dash it, you can't be angry with me just for not killing your father. I didn't mean to laugh."

He pursued her to the end of the path, and there held her lightly by the shoulders. His dancing faun's eyes were close to hers and his voice was quickened by anger of his own thoughtlessness. "Don't be angry with me, Jael. I'm such an awful fool. I always laugh at the wrong times. Let's do something, shall we? I've left my horse behind the copse."

Jael drew a deep breath. She looked round the garden and then into Richmond's face. Her words came in a little rush of breathless music.

"It's such a *splendid* morning," she said.

The murmur of the far-off valley brook was not more softly gay than her soft laughter. She did not know why she laughed nor why the lark's song rising from the lower meadow filled her with such joy. She looked again at Richmond and he at her. Her heart, that though she knew it not, had been so passionately waiting, flew straightway into his careless keeping. She did not know that she was no longer free, but captive—Jael captive, caught and held in the glance of vivid eyes and challenge of mocking mouth. She only knew that the grass under her feet was alive with magic, and magic the tree that lifted its young green against the dazzling sky. Magic the petals falling through the waiting air. Magic the sun that robbed the upland wind of its sharp mastery. Magic the day, magic the hour. Magic, magic, the lightness of her own swift limbs and the tide of youth that swept her up and winged her feet as she ran across the lower garden with Richmond at her heels. She laughed, and turned to him her small enraptured face.

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"I'll get my pony. Shall I fetch a gun? Let's go and get some rabbits."

She stopped. Her body, poised for flight, was caught and held on the tiptoe of its joyous rush. She spoke, dismayed.

"I'd forgotten Jude," she said.

Richmond climbed prodigiously to get Jude, and having got him safely to the ground, regarded him unhopefully. "Can he ride?"

"We've only one pony," Jael said mournfully.

Jude's round face flushed crimson, and he pressed the back of one earth-stained hand against his mouth. Its babyish curves decided Richmond, even before Jael's cry.

"You don't suppose I'd *leave* you, darling!"

"He can stick on behind me, and pick up the—er—bag," Richmond said.

At the bottom of the hill they turned their horses up the valley along the narrow path. Jael was weighted with a monstrous pistol, rusted with age. When they had tied their horses and begun to climb the lower slope of Blackacres, Richmond looked at it with apprehension.

"Have you ever used that thing?" he asked.

Jael shook her head.

"Then I think you'd better leave the shooting to me."

Jael's soft mouth shut grimly. "If your eye is as good as your conceit," she said, "you should do well."

Richmond was so startled that he stood still in the middle of the path. But before he could retort, Jael's eyes filled with tears. She faced him nervously. "I don't know why I say these things," she murmured. "Theodocia says it is the devil."

"More likely John Trude," Richmond thought, but his smile was wholly kind, and Jael was comforted.

The slope was riddled with rabbit holes and Richmond

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halted. He took Jael's pistol in his hand. "These things want powder," he said doubtfully. "I don't believe I ever saw one fired." He was going to suggest that they exchange arms, but Jael's face warned him.

"You give me some of your shot," she said briefly, "and I'll be all right. I won't shoot bunnies, for fear I only hurt them, but I'll—er—practise."

He watched her load the preposterous thing and then turned his attention to the chances of the day. Jael fired unexpectedly—at a tree. He whirled round to find her crumpled up on the ground. When he touched she cried out: white and anguished, she huddled against his arm.

"Quick, Jude," he said. "The spring. Water. No, take your hat—your handkerchief, anything."

Jael opened her eyes. "It kicked worse than the wickedest kind of horse," she said, and achieved a smile.

Richmond's fingers, firm and tense, passed over her arm from wrist to shoulder. It was thin and delicately strong. "Nothing out," he said.

Jael sat up to comfort Jude: the fearful blood had leaped to his face, and his small mouth was tight and narrow. He crouched down beside her. Richmond watched them for a moment and then looked away. "They've forgotten I'm here," he said to himself.

There was no more stalking. Instead, they began to explore the stream that ran down from the moor to join the yalley beck. The incredible gloom of an African jungle encompassed them. Black and sluggish, the stream moved between fantastic trees. Africa, brooding, evil, inhuman, had swallowed them up. Their natives had deserted them. Their quinine was exhausted. Shaking with fever, they lay in their tent: a lantern stood on the floor, a flicker in the monstrous immensity of the jungle. Across the tiny circle of its light crawled a horror with swollen

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spotted body and hairy legs. The explorers regarded it with lustreless eyes, indifferent to horrors and sated with gloom. Far off a drum was beaten, thudding with faint maddening regularity. Indomitable, they rose in the morning and dragged on. Suddenly, following down a path between the crushing trees, they burst upon the Falls. The Source was reached.

"Medicine Bow Falls," said Jude.

Richmond disagreed. "Not in Africa."

"Medicine Bow," Jude repeated obstinately, and Jael supporting him, Medicine Bow it was. The Falls were fully twelve inches high. Richmond and Jael raised a cairn of flints while Jude danced ecstatically on the edge of the stream.

Jael fetched stones. "How old are you?" she asked. Richmond told her that he was fourteen.

"A year older than I am."

"You look younger," he said absently.

"That's my frock," Jael sighed. "Mary Bellber wears sashes. I *implored* Theodocia to buy me a sash, and she promised she would if the pigs sold well. Now one pig's dead and all my hopes."

Richmond stifled his laughter. "I'll bring you a sash when I come back from school," he said gently.

"That would be kind," Jael said politely, "but I'm afraid Theodocia would never allow it." She looked over her shoulder at a young bull which had wandered up from the low fields and was slowly drawing nearer. "Do you think that bull is going to gore us?" she asked.

"I don't think so," Richmond said. He threw a stone at the beast and watched it lumber away.

"I don't myself care for bulls," Jael added. "Though I dare say that if I were a bull I should sometimes chase people. I should chase fat farmers with red necks and hair growing in their ears. I should sometimes chase Theodocia—not too much,

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only a little to startle her. But if I saw a girl like me coming along, I should just turn my back and look meek."

The boy laughed. "Silly Jael," he said softly, and the gay affection in his voice was so strange to Jael that she could only look at him, and looking, set unconscious feet a little farther down the hidden path.

Hunger drove them back to Trudesthorp, where Richmond so beguiled Theodocia that—a little grimly—she fed them royally, and royally forgave Jude, who made himself very small and meek. Afterwards, lying in the grass of the orchard, Jael read aloud how by Misadventure of an Adder the Battle began where Sir Mordred was Slain, and King Arthur wounded to Death.

Her voice was soft, and she sang a little in her speech, with an intonation echoing Theodocia's. Then she read Chaucer, which she did not understand so well, but read with a shy caressing care. Richmond listened, watching her grave gestures, and the small rapt face of Jude. He felt a power stirring in his blood, and a joy that fired his cheeks and taught his pulse a mad new song. He felt that he would be great, famous, crowned. The world was his. He would be a flaming torch that drew all men to him. He rolled over on his face in sudden shame of his own dreams.

Jael read on. The violet leaves stirred and whispered under the trees. Over the pied grass the old gods of wheat and wine came softly, half remembering, half forgetting—under the limpid northern sky—those other skies burning over purple seas and over hidden groves. A little dimmed, a little faint of voice, as if their words were borne along the wind, they came. As half-strange revellers beguiled on a May morning, as old heroic figures wandering forlornly in a new and child-like land as shades in a child's dream, as they came to Chaucer—lovely and

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wistful, with hesitant feet and eyes irradiate with a passing dream, the gods of Greece treading the cool grass of an English orchard.

Jael shut the book.

"Ah, Sir Launcelot," said King Arthur, "this same day have I sore missed thee." Slowly Sir Bedivere lifted the noble sword, but when he saw where the pummel and the haft were all of precious stones he thought it sin and shame to throw it away: so he hid the sword and returned. "What saw ye?" said the King. "Sir," said he, "I saw nothing but the water, wap, and waves waun." "Alas," said King Arthur, "would to God that I had here Sir Launcelot, the flower of all good knights. Then had I not been betrayed for a rich sword." Sir Bedivere felt the reproach. With flushed cheeks and tightened lips he flung the sword beyond the poplars, and returning, set King Arthur in his barge.

Guenever took his head in her lap. "Alas, dear lord," she said, "look on your Queen."

The King sat up hastily. "Do keep to the story," he protested. "Guenever never came."

"I'm quite sure she came," Jael said earnestly.

"It doesn't say so," Richmond retorted.

"Let's play she came."

"Oh, very well."

So, with Guenever's white hands about him and Guenever's tears upon his face, the King passed into the vale of Avilion. "Death doesn't hurt," he said.

Launcelot stood before his lady. "Because of me," she said, in a fine fury of remembered words, "is my most noble lord slain. Delight is laid abed and pleasure past—and therefore I am set never to look upon thy face again, for I am sorrow and sorrow is I."

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Sir Launcelot took up his sword. "Very well," he said. "I'm sorry you won't come. I have a good castle, and had you come, sweet madam, I had deemed nothing too dear for thee. But since you'd rather be a nun, I pray you kiss me once and never more."

The Queen wavered. She had sworn to abstain from such things, but below her on the sward Sir Launcelot stood straitly, in his eyes the ghost of an unquenched smile. He lifted his face. Heavy lashes shadowed Guenever's wide grey eyes. She bent her head and kissed him on the mouth. Sir Launcelot stood still.

The winds of Arcady blow strange and sweet, blow and are gone.

Richmond would have again the doleful battle. The garden was filled with the noise of rushing and riding, grim words and deadly strokes: many a knight was laid to the cold ground and Sir Mordred sat him down and cried quietly, doubled fists pressed against his eyes. He was only five, and he was tired of being all the traitors.

Richmond looked at him. "What's the matter?" he asked. Jude, whose disappointment in his lot grew with thinking on, sobbed more loudly. Richmond laughed.

He stepped back with a bewildered gasp. Jael, eyes blazing in a white face, had whirled upon him, anger incarnate. "How dare you laugh at Jude?" she stammered. "Stupid, clumsy —*cow.*"

Richmond hid his hurt. "I'm sorry," he began stiffly.

"Jude and I are sorry," Jael interrupted, "that we asked you to stay here. We don't really want you."

But the boy had recovered his sense of values. He looked down at the furious girl. "That's easily remedied, my dear," he answered, and smiling his faun's smile, turned on his heel and was gone.

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Jael's cheeks burned. She felt small and graceless, and she saw that her bare feet were streaked with dust and her frock torn in two new places and ludicrously short. Her eyes shone with tears of rage. She hated the boy because his clothes were not torn and outgrown: she hated his grace and the drawling tones of his voice. She clenched her fists and imagined herself trampling on him with her dusty feet.

Jude touched her arm. "You're angry, Jael," he said timidly.

Jael whirled round. "He laughed at you," she said.

Jude shook his head. "Well, I don't mind," he told her.

There was a pause. "I expect he's laughing at me now," Jael said queerly.

She looked forlornly round the garden, and sitting down beside Jude rubbed each small brown foot with the hem of her frock.

Richmond rode home. As he rode past the long staggering front of the Drew house, he thought it looked uncommon shapeless and uncommon dull. He had never thought before upon its womanless solitude. He was still angry and he resented his anger and the tumult of his mind. He called Jael Trude's brat, and swore to hatred of the breed. The thought of John Trude filled him with unreasoning wrath and a wilder disgust. He turned savagely across the yards to the barn which was his own place and there sat down.

Dusk came over the edge of the hills, warm with dreams. Richmond sat with brooding eyes: a tranquil joy lifted and bore him out beyond the shadowed room. He stood up and stretched his arms, filled with a new delight in his own youth and strength. The secret knowledge that had stirred him in the sunlit orchard took to itself a body and a voice from the shifting dusk. It looked at him with shining confident eyes, and his own heart answered its audacious words.

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Unbidden, Jael came before him, pale like a flower, looking shyly between the curtains of her hair. He remembered her injured arm, and a sudden pity swelled in his throat. The memory of its childish thinness hurt him.

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CHAPTER IV

THE gods had prepared an ordeal for Jude.

Towards midnight he awoke, very thirsty, and fumbled on the table for his cup of water. The cup was empty, and the whim seized Jude to go down into the courtyard and pump some for himself.

He had never been out at midnight. The sky was thick with stars, flung out like flowers across a fabulous meadow. He stumbled past Theodocia's bean rows and round the corner of the main kitchens into the courtyard. His bare feet pattered over the courtyard and the starlight shone on his lifted face and wide wandering eyes. Round the corner of the pump came slowly a shadow creeping, creeping. Jude stopped, his eyes still upturned. With a little sigh he trotted forward, fell over a horrid, moving heap, and rolled, shrieking, across the yard. He picked himself up, and as he ran he caught a glimpse of Martha Sheldon's face staring ghastly from the shadows and Martha's back curved against the looming wall. A streak of light showed up against the dark bulk of the house. Jude flung himself against it. The door opened and he flew along the passage into the great hall.

He had been there once before—in daylight, and then it had not seemed so sinister and unkindly a place. His heart beat madly in his breast. He stood still. The firelight filled the place with unfamiliar shadows and pools of yellow light. Huddled against the flames, John Trude sat alone, a monstrous mummy, swathed in blankets.

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Jude turned away. His fearful steps echoed round the hall. He beat desperate hands upon the umbered walls and could not find the door. He began to run wildly, and suddenly, stopping with a jerk, was face to face with Trude.

The old man turned upon him a huge, expressionless face. He was half lying along an ancient day bed. The ends raked outwards, and the mattress, damask-covered, was ripped from end to end. A hunting-flask, overturned, had soaked the embroidered quilt and wine was dripping in a little pool upon the floor.

Trude was dreamily drunk. He lifted his head and stared at the child. Jude's small hands were twisted in the scanty folds of his nightgown: his hair, that was yellow and downy like a baby's, rayed round his head, and his breath came fitfully between his parted lips. Trude spoke.

"Where's the old besom gone?" he asked.

"She's in the courtyard," Jude said. He came hopefully a little nearer the fire. The warmth comforted his small body. His father said no more and Jude took heart of grace. After a while he began to lean against the end of the day bed. A pillow had fallen under its out-flung curving end. His eyes grew heavy: he swayed a little, and at last, slipping down upon the pillow fell asleep.

He was wakened by Trude's voice vaguely bellowing. He did not realize that Trude was now very drunk indeed, but he saw Martha sitting on the hearthstone with her hands folded in her lap, and he was afraid again.

Martha chuckled.

"Dost ah know nobbut one story?" she said contemptuously. "I ha' heard that one more times than enough."

Trude leaned down and picked Jude up, and set the child in front of him on the warm bricks, where he stood, with drooping head and hot hands doubled in impotent entreaty. The

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roaring voice deafened him, but as he listened, uncomprehending, fantastic pictures took form and flitted through his mind. There was a tale of a sea-voyage and a storm, when the waters were torn apart and heaped up against the sky, and the boat lay in the blackness of the pit, whence she was plucked up and flung again between the knees of the wind. She came out between them with her decks, Trude said, swept as clean as a babby's fist. He had been crazed and they battened him down in the hold where he lay roaring and railing on death.

He was roaring like a madman as he talked, and Jude thought the walls shook around him. "Where is this death," he cried, "that lives neither in hills nor valleys nor dens of beasts nor tempests?"

Abruptly, his voice dropped to an echoing whisper. "Get candles, boy," he said. Jude reached trembling hands for the candle, guttering in the draught from the staircase. His chest felt tight and his eyes burned in his head.

Trude pulled the boy in front of him. "Lift un up," he said. Obediently, Jude held up the tarnished candlestick. The hot wax trickled over his hand and dropped on the floor. Trude chuckled. "Good boy," he said. "Ull make better bones than old Trude, unless you break your neck or fall foul of a wench. You mun press 'em, boy. They'll trick 'ee if they can, they'll sulk, they'll baulk, they'll swerve. I ha' chased a wench into a beck before now." His great body shook with mirth: he laughed as the gods laugh, without pity or malice.

Swaying and whispering, he leaned forward. "There was one, a tricksy thing. Crazed I've grown, looking for her. Crazy Trude. All's gone, all's gone. Lord ha' mercy on me." He cried out loudly. "Mercy? Mercy? Who should ha' mercy on Trude? Who can stay death? Who can cleanse the corrupt heart? Who can turn away pain? I ha' lived too long and would be glad to ha' done."

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He sucked in a prodigious breath. The figure of the child wavered up and down before his eyes. He had long since forgotten that Jude was only a little boy. Jude's fair head was lost in the shadows of the roof: he was nine feet tall: he was a giant. The flame of the candle swelled and grew. Trude began to whimper a little. "I ha' lived so long," he said, "and cannot tell what life is. It comes like a breath and a whisper, like a small wind. Then swells and rushes and roars: then sinks, then sighs, then drops like a wind sighing through the grasses. Then goes. Come on a cry, gone on a breath." He lifted himself on one arm and clutched at Jude with the other. "Get out," he said, and screamed. "Get out. I wunna ha' you now. Get out, death."

Jude began to cry. He dropped the candle, that fell clattering across the floor, and wrung his hands. One-half Trude's wandering wits knew well that here was only a frightened little boy. The other half was running on hobgoblins and death. He looked over his shoulder and back again to Jude. A glint of cunning came into his eyes. He stretched his hand towards the staple in the wall and shouted, "Ha hoop!" The great wolf-hounds leaped and whimpered. Trude dropped the chain and gripped them by the neck.

Jude's tears froze on his cheeks.

"You shan't trick me," Trude said. "Let's ha' your name."

Jude called wildly for Jael. Fragments of prayers came into his head, and he cried—"Look upon a little child." But no one looked except Martha, rocking and chuckling on the hearthstone. Not Jael, the valiant defender, sleeping in her bed, nor the soul of dead Anne, nor any angel or avenging God. He was alone, a little boy lost.

"Your name," Trude coaxed, and took the boy's arm in a terrible grip.

Jude lifted his hands. "I'm Jude."

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"You're not," Trude said. "I named you Judas. Judas who betrayed our Lord. Now let's ha' it."

Trembling lips and ghostly small whisper of sound. "It's Judas."

Martha laughed and rocked. Perhaps she thought—"Old men ha' whimsies in their cups." Trude's voice cracked, and he bent his unseeing face against the child's.

"Your name, boy, your name."

Imploring eyes, that saw only madness and shadows of madness where they looked.

"Judas who betrayed our Lord."

"Is it so?" Trude said softly. "You should be punished. Martha, the door. The door, old faggot. Stir your skinny limbs. Open the door."

The door stood open on the vaults of night. A child ran across the lawn. With staggering steps he ran and hands stretched out and eyes blind with fear. Behind him in the hall, Trude fastened up the hounds, laughing his selfless laughter. But Jude heard them following as he ran. He heard the breath panting in their outstretched throats. He did not think: he did not cry. After a while he ceased to run. He walked, stumbling and sobbing. The trees of the copse prodded him with knotted fingers and he shrieked.

A young farmer saw him after dawn, standing on the crumbling slope of an old quarry below the moor. His gown hung in rags about his little body, that was so woefully scratched and torn. The man scrambled down, calling as he came. "Who is it?"

The boy looked up. "Judas," he said. "Judas who——"

Some light in the kindly face above his own poor face pierced the blackness through which he moved.

"I'm Jude," he cried. "I'm Jael's little boy. I'm Jude," and crying so, slipped backwards, rolling with a clatter of

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loosened shale, down from under the outstretched saving hand.

Followed a day when Jael knelt beside her little boy's bed. Followed nights, many nights, when Theodocia sat there sorrowful, and heard and dared not hear the tiny rasping voice repeating hideous things.

In the end Jude's fall proved the more outwardly serious of the night's misfortunes. His right leg was useless from the knee. John Hender brought doctors from London and paid for them out of his not too deep pockets. But they did nothing and held out no hope. After a while they gave up worrying him, and he got up and began to limp about.

He had grown amazingly taller during the weeks he lay in bed, and his face had lost the soft, indecisive curves of its babyhood: it had instead a breathless beauty that hurt and stabbed by its perilous audacity. Theodocia watched him dumbly when he walked, dragging his useless leg in furious impatience. She had none but soft words for him. He tried in vain to make her angry.

"Why don't you beat me, Doxie?" he mocked. "You never beat me now."

"I can't beat you, my wee lamb," she murmured.

"Well, I wish you would," he retorted. "You're as gloomy as an owl and not nearly so amusin'."

She looked at him strangely and his face changed. He crept nearer. "Doxie," he said gravely, "it was I who was punished for killing the little pig, wasn't it? You weren't punished when it was killed. I was punished for disobeying you, wasn't I?"

She could not answer him, and after a while he put his arms round her neck to comfort her.

He was queerly hard for a little boy. His tongue had a mocking and unchildlike edge, as if a changeling sprite inhabited some corner of his child's heart. He raged against

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Theodocia because she would pity him, and the poor creature never understood it, and grieved for the wilful wondering little Jude that she had lost.

Jael, who could at all times coax the lost Jude from his hiding-place, had the wisdom of children and half-wits to let him alone. But even Jael did not know the depth of his hurt until a night—a year after his ordeal—when she came into his room and found him crying, his head hidden in the bedclothes and his body shaken with unchildlike grief.

She flung herself beside him, and held him, murmuring frightened loving words and patting him with her soft fingers. "What is it? What is it, darling?"

He clung to her. "My leg," he said softly and desperately. "Oh, Jael, my leg, my leg."

She could only try to comfort him by pressing her face against his. "I didn't know you minded like that," she said at last. "I didn't know."

He said no more, but lay quiet in her arms. At last she ventured softly—"Have you prayed to God about it, Jude?"

He gave her one swift upward look, a flash of blue eyes and curve of long dark lashes. "Haven't you?" he said.

She nodded. "Of course I have. But probably God was waiting for us both to pray."

Jael, offering up her petition, felt that Jude trembled violently at her side. He began to pray after her, abruptly, in brief childish phrases, but with a most desperate eagerness. His cheeks were flushed and he lifted his hands with clasped imploring fingers. "Make it better," he entreated. "Oh, You could, You *could*. Make it *better*, God."

Nothing answered but the wild surf-music of the pines below the window. There was no one there to tell them that God cannot make His laws read backwards to save one little boy. Jude got back into bed and Jael, tucking him up,

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whispered, "Aren't you glad there's two of us, Jude darling?"

He kissed her and fell asleep.

Jude did not cry again, or if he did, Jael did not know it. He grew stronger, and Mrs. Bellber gave him Mary's cob. He rode with a debonair and reckless courage, and seeing him try six times at an impossible fence, she threatened to take it back. He gave her a droll affectionate glance.

"You couldn't," he said. "You know I'm such a lame little boy."

He laughed delightedly at her perplexed silence, but stopped his laughter to stroke her leathery cheek. "I'll be careful," he promised. "I wouldn't hurt him. You know I wouldn't."

"You'll break your neck," she said, and sighed.

He shook his small fair head. "The cracked cup never breaks," said he and laughed again.

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BOOK II

"How Queen Guenever rode on Maying."

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CHAPTER I

RICHMOND at nineteen. He has the narrow Drew head, narrow face and bright faun's eyes—a boy's face, with the fugitive immature beauty of first youth, and in repose, a strange and dreamy serenity, as if the boy hugged to his breast a secure and secret joy.

Every boy aware of his strength and with a mind to dream knows in his heart that he is the Youngest Brother, able to do magic and win a kingdom. But Richmond's magic was in his hands and in the dreams he shared with all the artists that have dreamed and wrought and suffered and entered into immortal life in the souls of dreamers unborn. He was very strong, with a long powerful back and narrow loins. Every part of him was harmoniously alive. He was young life itself, reckless of youth and prodigal of strength.

It seemed to Richmond on this March morning that he stood on the very topmast pinnacle of joy. He was in England after five years of exile. His grandfather, the son of that Nathaniel Drew who made a frieze for Nicholas his friend, had betaken himself to a solitary village some thirty miles north-west of Neuchatel; two days after Richmond's meeting with Jael he appeared suddenly and demanded that Richmond should be handed over to him. He was very old and prodigiously active. Richmond's father made no bones about it. "You can have the boy for five years," he said. "After that he comes back."

The old man was satisfied. He thought that in five years he could make Richmond a philosopher as well as an artist.

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He did his best. For five years the boy and his grandfather lived alone, seeing no one but the old peasant who brought their supplies up from the village. Richmond watched the sun rise and the sun set and the stars flow westward over the world. He watched day step riotously into the net of night, and woke in time to see the net gathered again and laid away behind the hills. He had little Latin but more Greek and he learned to speak and read French and German and Italian. Also he learned his art under a teacher as wise as he was rigorous. And once they went to Florence, where Richmond moved in a dream, drunk with the heavy wine of the Renaissance.

Richmond had long ago known that he would be a sculptor. But his grandfather taught him also forgotten secrets of colour-mixing and a lore of herbs, and plunged him deep in the science of metals. He made him read, and showed him not only the wise opulent beauty of Olympus, but the harsh and bloody myths of an elder North. He said he had no use for the modern artist that knows nothing but the tricks of his own art, and ignores the arts and labours of the rest of the world. He held up to him the transcendent disquieting catholicity of Leonardo, the perfect artist. He taught him the polite art of fencing and saw with joy that the boy grew in grace as in strength, so that body and soul alike were initiated into the sharp piercing Hellenic dream of beauty. And day after day he kept him sketching and modelling until the boy's great strength flagged and tasks had to be lessened or abandoned. . . .

Richmond at nineteen, mercury in his veins and a dream of power in his head, wise in old wisdom and innocent of life, a young god nursed in secret, tinder to fire.

He stood on the crest of Nethermoor. The sky was a clear cold blue, and in the hollows of the valley burned the brave crocus and the pale glimmering primrose. A west wind blew soft and fresh. It blew Richmond's hair into his eyes and him

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off the hillock on which he stood. He ran down the hill-side with long leaping strides.

Where the path turns sharply to avoid a slope of rock he came upon Jael Trude. She was standing looking across the valley, the thin curve of her cheek etched against the black stem of a fir tree.

Before she turned her head, he knew her. In Switzerland he had not remembered her at all, but now he saw that she had been in his heart always. He was not surprised to find her now: he thought that ever since he came home in yesterday's humid dusk he had known that she would be waiting. He had known it when he stood on the moor edge and when he ran down the hill.

Jael turned her head. For a moment he stood still in half-resentful wonder. It was Jael the child who had waited hidden in his heart, and this Jael was a girl. Her dark hair was parted in two heavy plaits and fastened round her head. Her face was as he remembered it—small, narrow, softly curved and of a transparent pallor. When he looked at her eyes he thought them grey, and looking again found them the blue of summer dusks. Amazing eyes, he thought, and forgot that first resentful pang. It was Jael the child who looked at him from their clear deeps, and Jael the child whose cry of welcome broke the waiting silence. She ran forward, and stopping suddenly, with hands outstretched, stammered—"Oh, you *do* know me?" He watched the warm blood rushing under the white skin, and all the time he could only stand like a fool and look. The years of his noviciate were over. The flame had reached the tinder: wisdom and innocence were ablaze together, making a riot of his blood.

He said—"Oh, Jael, I've come home."

She drew her hands out of his and they walked soberly down the path.

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She had told him of Jude and he of his life in Switzerland, and they were sitting on a fallen gate post in the lee of the wind. The little wood called Weetwood, that covered both slopes of the valley just here, was behind them. Between its bare trees they saw where bluebells lay like a haze over the ground. He was talking of his plans.

"I have an uncle in Leeds," said he, "who makes sundials and garden statuary. He is very rich—the Drew works are large—but my father would not go in with him. He stays here and makes the new models and the designs that my uncle's workmen copy. He despises my father, but my father is an artist and he is only a merchant."

"What are you going to do?" Jael asked him then.

"I am going to help my father and be a sculptor."

Jael looked up at him, and again he essayed the depths of her eyes and again came back dizzily to life with throbbing pulses and stammering speech. They climbed slowly back towards the moor: he lifted from her path a straggling branch, and once when she stumbled he caught her by the shoulder. When she had gone, he stood bewildered, feeling again her thin shoulder under his hand, and half wild with pity and amaze.

A week later Jael came to find him at his home. He took her into the old barn where all one side was now a long window. Floor and benches were strewn with sheets of paper. Jael picked them up and looked at the vivid sketches, a hand, a foot, a curve of bent back, a leg taut and poised as if it took the weight of a dancer, a bird, a man's thigh, and in all of them the sense of flow and movement. Richmond's knowledge of anatomy was profound and accurate. The old man had taught him one secret supremely well. "Nothing that lives is still," said he. "If a man sleeps his blood is still running in his veins. If he stands still his muscles are waking under his skin. Get

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movement, find it, hold it. If your work moves it lives, if it does not move it is dead, a tombstone—your tombstone." Richmond made a myriad sketches, of movements so transient that eye and hand seemed one.

Jael held a drawing in her hand. More finished than the others, it showed a small child lying on its back: one plump knee was in the air and his soft round belly was shaken with the laughter that curved his mouth and bellowed out his cheeks. Richmond looked over her shoulder.

"Do you like it?" he said. Jael nodded. "Come, and I'll show you what my father does." He took her to the yard and showed her the rounded naked boy that John Drew patiently worked over with small tools. The sunshine warmed the yellowing stone, and under his loving touch the child came joyously alive. His round limbs and the curve over his breast were soft and warm. Jael stood entranced.

"It's a great joy," the boy said shyly when they had turned away, "to work for gardens. I like to think that I'll make things for the sun and the wind to keep alive." He added—"I'd like everything I ever do to be put into a garden."

Richmond came to Trudesthorp. He sat with Jael in the orchard where once he had been with Mordred the traitor and Guenever the queen. The neglected trees blossomed sparsely and the long grass was mazed with daffodils. One door opened into the walled garden where Anne came looking for death, and another opened on to a field that lay below the edge of the moor.

Jael was silent, sitting with folded hands. She was almost always silent; when Richmond talked eagerly her cheeks flushed, and behind heavy lashes her eyes shone with a most starry joy. But she could not talk. Tongue-tied and shy she listened, and stored what he had said in her mind. She supposed he

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thought her stupid and was afraid to speak lest he should be sure she was. And he, that was on fire at sight of her, found her silences more wise than any words.

He was resolved to tell her that she was made to be loved and that he loved her, but he could find no words that seemed to him proper to use. He imagined her looking at him with wide eyes aghast and flying from him, startled and afraid.

"Jael," he said suddenly, "will you ever be married?"

"I don't know," Jael answered. "Anne was married and Theodocia says she must have been very unhappy."

"Anne didn't love," Richmond decided.

"Love." Jael's voice lifted the word softly and let it die on the gentle air of the orchard.

The boy sat stiffly. "Nothing else makes marriage right," he said. "To marry, you must love so that the other person is as much you as you are yourself. You must love with your mind and your soul and your body, and not keep back anything. Love of the body would be nothing—nothing at all—without the other things."

Jael did not speak. A strange trembling had seized her limbs and she pressed her hands together so that he should not see how they shook. The boy's lips parted with a quick breath: she lifted her eyes, and in their candid light the words that filled his mind seemed hot and wild. Her lashes where they caught the sun were bronzed: they hid her eyes again, but Richmond could not speak.

His voice choked him. "You're such a *young* girl, Jael," he said.

Jael laughed. "You're nineteen and I'm eighteen. What a dreadful difference."

She caught sight of Jude through the thickset hedge. With a flutter of long skirts she had crossed the orchard and was calling, calling.

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Long after dark she stood in the walled garden. The moonlight fell on her green gown, glimmering ghostly round her, and on her upraised face and wide eyes. More elf than woman seeming, she walked the mossy path with dancing step, and came through the little door into the orchard. She thought the hulk of Blackacres was like a dragon sleeping. She thought the flowers at her feet were whispered words. "Pale flowers blowing softly in the dawn," she said, and "Moon, old traverser of eternity." She liked to make phrases, being half poet and wholly dreamer. She dreamed as she stood there, and the dream had the lineaments of life. Lips touched her parted lips and arms folded her straitly. She lifted her face and swayed a little, with thin hands folded across her breast. The wind blew back her hair and showered blossom round her. She flung her arms wide in a gesture that embraced the swinging stars, and ran back through the garden to the house.

Theodocia saw her in the hall, and marked her shining eyes and fugitive breath. She let the girl run half-way up the stairs, then called her back. Jael came reluctantly.

"What do you want, Doxie?" she murmured.

Theodocia regarded her grimly. "You'm a grown maid now," she said, "and I can't keep 'ee small if I would. But I can keep 'ee good. Will you mind what I tell 'ee?"

Jael nodded impatiently.

"Yon Drew's a rare fine boy. Maybe he'm good, leastways so far as I can see. But he'm a grown man, and 'tis the same with them all. A look too long and a kiss too much and black mischief done. Now mind 'ee, Jael."

Jael bent a grave face over the bannister to kiss Theodocia. She remembered the words for fully two minutes. They stirred a vague hinterland of thought that had been stirred before, by words and happenings in her books. They did no more than stir it, and that but a little, for Jael the girl had a literal and

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unenquiring mind; and things not to be understood at once faded rapidly from her conscious thoughts. She stood at her window and saw where the lights in scattered upland farms marked the hidden road. She heard the trees of Weetwood answer the distant sea, and was filled with a warm rich happiness. "I'm glad I live here," she murmured.

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CHAPTER II

EARLY April and a swift warm spring. The delicate green leaves of the birch trees were flung out in the upper air. They glanced like spray in the sunshine. A fine golden light poured between the trees and flowed down the valley. Jael had ridden to the Drew house and seen Richmond at work. He was finishing a contemplative baby: Jael looked at it from the side, liking the short upper lip jutting over the lower, the wide tranquil eyelid, and jolly double chin. Richmond showed her a tiny spray of leaves cut from the whole stone and hollowed away under the twisting stem. "That's not for Leeds," he said. "That's for a doorway at Brampton. It will be years doing."

He took her into his barn and she looked at the scattered sketches, and the fragmentary models that were nothing but vivid impressions held in the clay.

When she was going, he said—"I'll come to Trudesthorp for you in the evening." She smiled, and left him plunging into a fury of work.

He came to Trudesthorp in the dusk. Jael ran out to meet him. She wore the long green coat that Mrs. Bellber had brought her and a fur cap pulled down over her hair. She was so gay and debonair and lifted so radiant a face to his that Richmond had ado not to kiss the laughing mouth. They walked together down the bridle-path to Weetwood, Jael skipping and hopping along by his side.

Once in the wood they went carefully. A faint glow filtered

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through the trees, so that they walked in a dim and fragrant aisle. The path lay along the side of the hill. They could hear but not see the beck that ran below them, straight as an arrow downward to the sea. Broken with the rains, and ridged with the roots of trees, the path dipped and rose and twisted. It widened where it passed below a small flat rock, sunk in last year's leaves.

Jael paused and dropped on one knee, her fingers searching among the leaves. She cried "Oh!" softly, and stood up. The first violets of the year lay across the hand she held out for Richmond's eyes.

"Look," she said, "oh look," and added—"They have no scent, you know."

Always he remembered her as she stood there, her eyes like happy stars in the narrow heaven of her face. A strand of hair had blown across her cheek and she lifted the other hand to push it back.

"They have no scent," said Jael.

He took the tiny things from her. "All you touch turns sweet," he said. "Jael, dear Jael."

And then he thought she cried out in fear. The colour faded from her cheeks. She stood looking at him with quivering lips and strange wide eyes. He groaned for his folly.

"Now you'll not walk with me again," he said, and turning from her, plunged back the way they came. A few steps and he halted, wondering in the midst of his anguished chagrin what mad thought had seized him to leave Jael alone in Weetwood in the gathering dusk.

She was standing where he had left her. He folded her cold hand in his and said, "Come along, my dear, we'll go home."

They went in silence until, where the path dropped sharply almost to the beck edge, Jael stopped and spoke.

"I love you, Richmond. Didn't you know?"

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He thought that was what she said and then he thought she could not have said it. The path below his feet was slung from hill to hill and shook with the roaring winds of space. He saw that one of the trees had thrust its farthest top through a star, and he knew they had been reft from earth and flung up and out upon the net of night. And then he knew that he was standing upon a narrow path in Weetwood with Jael's hand in his, and Jael, shy and tremulous, half child and half faery, waiting beside him with averted face.

The dizzy tumult of the last moment was gone from him, and gone the passionate desire to touch her. He lifted her hand and laid it against her face.

"O, Jael, I—worship you," he said.

Jael stood very still. The joy that flooded through her made speech too harsh a thing. She did not want to speak. Came a longing to run quickly between the trees and up through the cold-lit fields. She did not want to run from Richmond, but she wanted to stand alone in her room and look out at the enchanted lights.

He seemed to know her thought, because he began to walk slowly down the path. The hand he held grew warm, and he let it go and took the other hand to make that warm as well.

And so they came to Trudesthorp, and when they stood outside the door of the walled garden, Richmond hesitated, stooping a little over her. A constraint at once strange and sweet had fallen between them. She was so remote and elfin-seeming that he half thought she might dissolve into the shadows of the garden. Suddenly he was too shy to touch her. He loosed her hand and she slipped from him. He watched her vanish through a distant door.

Jael crept softly to her room. She did not know what impulse had made her run so quickly up the path. She did not think that Richmond might have kissed her, but deep within herself

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knew that a kiss would have been too much to bear. The joy she was holding to her breast was too frail, too perilously sweet. A touch would shatter it in blinding ecstasy. Jael drew a sharp breath. She kneeled beside her bed. "Dear God, make me good enough," prayed Jael, "make me good enough for Richmond."

She fell asleep with a quiet mind.

For two days she did not see him, and then he walked into Theodocia's kitchen and said—"Where is Jael?"

"What might you want with Jael?" Theodocia asked.

"To take her walking."

"It's a'most dark," Theodocia said bluntly.

The boy looked down into her anxious face. "I'll take care of your girl," he said.

The old woman looked dourly. "How do I know that?" she retorted unkindly.

Richmond laughed. "Because I love her," he said. "I wouldn't hurt her. Don't you know I wouldn't?"

Theodocia searched his face. "Is but a maid," she cried suddenly.

Richmond nodded. "Listen," he said. "I swear I'll take care of her. I swear it."

She turned away. "I ha' no time for marriages," she grumbled, and boxed his ears when he kissed her squarely on her cheek. Jael came into the kitchen, and Theodocia watched their grave greeting. Apparently she was satisfied, for when they two had gone she did but sigh and turned back to her endless labours.

Again in Weetwood. This night they walked straight through until they came where the path twisted up and out upon the treeless hill-side. They climbed up and stopped of one accord on the narrow rocky summit of the hill. The beck ran far below them, and the path followed down the hill into a grassy

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hollow. Beyond it the land rose again to the dark edge of the moor.

They went no further, but from the hill looked up the narrowing valley filled with purple shadows. The sky behind Nethermoor shone white where the hidden moon climbed softly and as they watched swung herself above the rim, flooding the moor with a chill radiance. Richmond looked at Jael and closed his eyes because she was so magically fair. When he looked again she was loosening the violets at her throat. "For you," she murmured, and tried to put them through the buttonhole of his coat. The stalks bothered her. "I'll put them through and you must catch them at the other side," she said. He lifted a hand obediently and Jael bent her head and kissed it, a light swift touch, and ran away from him, back down the path into the wood, running like a boy with a free reckless grace.

He overtook her just where the trees crowd thickest about the path. She walked on, he following, until they came to the small rock, and there he made her stay. She did not look at him when they were seated on that narrow place, not even when he put an arm round her shoulder and tried to turn her face to his. He was so filled with joy and wonder that he did not understand. Only when she held herself straitly from him, he was hurt and dropped his arm.

"What is it, sweet?" he said, and when she did not speak he slipped from the rock and knelt where he could look into her face. He touched it and found it on fire and knew then, with the wisdom born of his love, that she too was shaken and afraid. The memory of her fugitive lips thrilled him with a burning pity.

Love and pity made him gentle, but after a while he could no longer endure it. He spoke so softly that Jael had to stoop her head to listen.

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"I'm not touching you, my darling," he said. "I won't touch you if you'd rather I didn't. But you see that I—want to."

She had not time to realize the dizzy sense of power that set her wildly trembling before it was gone, swept away in such a whelming tenderness that she thought he must see her heart beating in her throat. She leaned forward, and Richmond, standing up, took her hands and drew her to her feet and bent his head to kiss her. Her cheek he kissed, her smooth averted cheek, and not her lips, for Jael looked shyly away.

She leaned against his shoulder with a sigh of pure delight: he took off her hat and kissed her hair and bent to touch her lifted throat. She held herself so still that he grew afraid to startle her and so stood in silence, watching the outline of her drooping head. He heard the faint fall of waters and felt the cool touch of a wandering wind. The fragrance of crushed violets rose up to him, so that always afterwards when he saw or touched or smelled them he remembered Jael's untouched loveliness and her childish languor in his arms, and the smooth softness of her cheek.

She lifted her head. "We haven't any money," she murmured. "Theodocia says I shall bring you nothing. Do you mind?"

He took her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth, holding her so that when he let her go she was breathless and half amazed. She steadied her voice to say again—"Nothing at all, my Richmond," and certain words came into his mind from an old book. *"Nothing,"* thought he, *"but faith and nakedness and maydenhede."*

He felt his face burned in the darkness, and he stooped to hide it against her breast. . . .

At home again, and in bed, he contemplated the old Drew house with a new mind, seeing Jael in it. There must be rooms made ready for her. The shabby discomfort that before he

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had hardly noticed would not do for Jael. For Jael. He smiled joyously in the darkness of his room. There must be servants got for Jael: he wondered a little grimly whether his father would take kindly to the change, and thought that it did not matter: he could turn the world upside down for Jael's pleasure. Before the servants came, himself would make her rooms ready, paint them, buy some things for them, make some things, rob the old house of its best for them. He would fill her room with violets, honey-hearted violets. "Oh, Jael, Jael," he repeated softly. He thought he saw her standing in the room, a *little* girl, strangely compounded of laughter and tears. "Dear Jael," he said, "pray God no tears for me." Jael contemplative: grave eyes, crystal-clear, and hands crossed on her breast. He thought she must have missed many things that young girls have, little things, little joys. What happiness to lay them at her feet, to see her eyes shine, and hear—"Oh, Richmond," on a quick-drawn breath. "I'll be so good to you, my little love," he said. "I'll take such care of you." He thought that he would write her a letter and tell her so, and on that thought fell asleep. . . .

Adding word to word and look to look, Jael stored up her memories. He had said—*"But you see that I—want to."* She saw his dark head close against her knee and heard the low stumbling voice. He had asked for comfort. Oh, if she could but show in words and touch of hands the longing to comfort him that now consumed her. Swelled in her throat the inarticulate compassion of her love. She was so filled with need to love him that it was hardly to be contained. She stood on tiptoe in an ecstasy of happiness. He had kissed her cheek. He had kissed her mouth. "Ah," Jael breathed, and put her hands to her burning cheeks.

Strangely, from the shadows, showed out the form and face of Anne, faint, like a wraith of the middle air, then slowly

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clear and sharp. Jael had not called her nor remembered her. But she saw, as in a tiny picture, herself curled in Anne's arms, with a slice of bread and jam that Anne had brought. She tasted the sharpness of the jam and the suave softness of the cream upon her tongue. The dark cloud of her mother's unhappiness came between Jael and her own bright joy. "Oh, Anne," she said, "dear Anne, I want you."

In the late morning came Richmond's letter by a passing farmer. Jael turned it over in her hand, surprised and mute; then walked slowly with it to the orchard.

She read it once and then again. He wrote, "Once in Italy, Jael, when the Renaissance was burning like wine in all men's throats, the grave of a Roman girl was found in the Appian Way. Death had not touched her. She was perfect, like beauty in a dream, and all the citizens came to do her honour. They were filled with awe and worshipped her. You are like that, Jael. You are strange and lovely and secret. You are slender and gallant. You sing beauty, like a boy's voice sings, like Giotto's tower in Florence sings, so piercing sweet, so fiercely gentle and exquisite, that my heart stops when I think of you. My heart is in your hands, Jael. You have perfect hands, thin and pointed like the dreaming hands of some Renaissance beauty, but that women's hands in those days were a little cruel and yours are kind.

"I can hardly think that you love me. I wish I could do something splendid for you, Jael. I wish we had been born four hundred years ago in Florence, where the streets and houses spring like lilies in the clear air. You would have been a flame there, Jael, with your soft disturbing beauty and your hands. You would have gone clothed in brocade with jewels in your hair. And I would have stormed a city for you, Jael.

"I will love you all my life, Jael."

And Jael, made foolish with love and sweet surprise, pressed

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the letter to her heart, and laid it, with Anne's poems and an adored lace scarf, in her treasure box.

She answered it before the day was out, writing slowly in a round careful hand, with a tip of tongue between her teeth and her brows drawn down in effort.

"It is a dear letter you have written me. I am afraid you will think me stupid and childish when you know me better. I could never write a letter like that. This morning I have to help Theodocia mend the linen. I shall not mind, because I can think of other things while I sew. I can think of Weetwood and how dear you are. When you come I will show you the little new calf. It was born this morning and has darling tottery legs and such soft skin. There is a calf like it in the frieze your great-grandfather made. It is wonderful that you are to be a great sculptor. Last night I thought perhaps you would be sorry afterwards that you had not married someone wiser and better. Will you promise me that if ever you are sorry, you will tell me? I wouldn't bother you, dear Richmond. I'd just go away. I could bear that, but I couldn't bear for you not to tell me. I would be happy if once you had been glad because of me. I love you dearly.

"JAEL."

She knew already that she would not leave Jude and Theodocia alone in Trudesthorp. It was characteristic of her that she said nothing of it to Richmond.

The letter sent, she began to hoard up in her mind some things she might say to Richmond. She thought that if she planned them now, she would not be tongue-tied when he came, and he would not think her stupid. As it happened, his father hurried Richmond off to Leeds for a week, and when he came back, though Jael had not forgotten her secret hoard, it was not used.

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Nothing happened as she thought it would. Richmond came to Trudesthorp in the late afternoon, riotously happy. He kissed Jael before Theodocia, making her blush hotly and unhappily. All the way down the hill towards their wood he talked so much and so quickly that Jael grew confused and could not answer him. In the wood he halted, and leaning against a tree, drew Jael to him, kissing her with a passionate eagerness and holding her close to him. Breathless, Jael turned aside her face: he kissed her hair and the hollow of her temple.

Across her troubled thoughts flashed a vague memory of Theodocia's warning. Theodocia had warned her against this. Formless and shadowy, a host of fears rose from some unexplored region of her mind. She shrank violently from Richmond's seeking mouth.

He felt the movement, and seeing her face, let her go. He could not speak for a moment, choking down his hurt, and when words came he could not for his life have made them anything but harsh.

"Do I offend you, Jael?" he said.

She shook her head. Her knees were strangely weak and she wished he would hold her gently until her strength came back to her. But he stood there stiffly, with a grave angry face.

"You don't like me to kiss you?" he said. "I won't, of course."

He began to walk on, and she followed him. Her throat was tight with pain. Turning, he saw the unhappiness in her face and his own changed. He took her hands. "Little thing," he said gently, "tell me what I've done. I'd cut my hand off rather than hurt you."

She looked at him, struggling with her tears. He was

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holding her so gently, just as she had wished. Why must she cry? She hid her face and felt him draw one arm away. He was lifting her face. He dried her tears with his own handkerchief and kissed her mouth that would not stop from trembling. "Dear little girl, oh dear little Jael," he said, "what is it? Tell me what it is."

She shook her head at that and he began to plead with a soft urgency. "I shall be so unhappy if you don't tell me. How can I go and leave you to-night, thinking that somehow I've hurt you? I must know what I've done. Darling, darling Jael. I shouldn't sleep. I can't bear you to cry."

She was then so tenderly anxious to assure him, that she tried—in a very faltering speech—to tell him what Theodocia had said. He listened with a frowning attention: abruptly his mouth twitched and he began to laugh, a boy's careless laughter that woke the echoes up the quiet valley. "Why, my darling foolish little thing," he cried.

Her grave face sobered him to a sudden dismay. He let go her hands. "Surely you don't think——" His voice was very stern and he halted it at sight of her plain bewilderment. His face changed again.

"Jael," he said quietly, "what *are* you thinking?"

She gave him a troubled glance. "I don't know what I think," she told him.

He had a moment of swift, startled insight. "Don't you *know* what Theodocia meant?" he asked.

"No," said Jael, and would have left it there, but Richmond was shocked past speech. His dismay would have been comic if it had not been so boyishly vehement. He was almost ready to be angry with Jael until the memory of her tears stabbed him afresh. He felt suddenly very wise and full of love.

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He put an arm round her thin shoulders and said—"You must make Theodocia tell you just what she meant. This very night. Promise me, Jael."

Obediently, Jael promised.

He spent the greater part of the next day walking furiously about the moor, consumed with rage at his own blindness. What a fool, what a clumsy thrice damned fool he had been that he did not guess before. He should have known that nothing so childishly perfect could live but in a world of dreams. He groaned for the hard need of crushing Jael's dreams. "But I couldn't marry a child," he cried. "It 'ud be murder. Oh, I ought to be cleverer and older." And then he groaned again in the sudden fear that Jael would hate him and turn from him. So young and untouched. The boy clenched his fists in the ardour of his vow. "I'll be kind to her. I'll make everything beautiful for her. Dear Jael, dear child Jael."

Twice he walked towards Trudesthorp and twice turned back. The third time he met Jael crossing the lower fields, and putting his arm through hers, turned her towards the valley and Weetwood.

They said very little until they came to the half-way rock. Richmond sat down and pulled her on to his knee. She curled her slight form against him, and after a while said dreamily—"I asked Theodocia as you told me."

Richmond waited. He was sure that Jael would not lie, but her manner puzzled him. He hated to question her: he hated worse to leave undecided so fateful an issue. Jael sat up and looked at him.

"Are you worrying, Richmond?"

The boy stirred restlessly. "I am wondering if Theodocia made you happier—or not so happy?"

Jael said gravely, "Theodocia said that I must never

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stay with you too long or let you hold me too closely."

"Is that all she said?"

Jael nodded.

"Jael," Richmond said desperately, "are you satisfied?"

Jael considered him a little before she spoke. "I know that I don't understand some things," she said slowly.

"Are you afraid, Jael? Afraid of me? Of marrying me?"

Jael shook her head. "Only a very *little* afraid," she said softly.

Richmond's thoughts raced round and round his head. He would kill that doddering fool of an old woman. She had better have held her tongue than talk in riddles. His very kisses were spoiled for Jael. She would be afraid of him, of his arms. When he held her she would be wondering, wondering, shrinking from him and afraid lest he should see it. In a queer vision—queer for a boy to have—he saw Jael's mind with its medley of dreams stolen from old books, its depths untroubled and its quaint makeshift philosophy: he saw himself in it like a thief. He looked into her eyes —filled so with the morning glory of her love, and was sorry for her because she did not know him for the thief he was.

He put her gently off his knee, making her sit beside him on the rock.

He made his voice gentle to tell her what Theodocia meant, simply, and with the most loving care. He did not falter for words, though his heart and his whole body ached for her, sitting with folded hands beside him in the cool night, while, compassionate as a mother, he took her childhood reverently from her. He did but serve his lady with his passionate boy's innocence as later he meant to serve her with his man's strength and wit.

She neither looked nor spoke, but lifted his hand and laid her cheek against it. In sober wise they walked to Trudes-

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thorp, save when Jael laughed at a small owl that sat and cried ridiculously on a rail. Richmond's heart lightened at her laughter. "She does not hate me, then," he thought. He tried, in bidding her good-night, to put his fear and his inarticulate compassion into the pressure of his arms. He thought she clung to him, and as he went, made again his silent vows.

He did not learn then, nor indeed for many years, to what a white flame of adoration Jael came, thinking of his kindness. Perhaps, if she had talked more readily, he had spared himself and her much of what afterwards happened to their hurt.

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CHAPTER III

JUDE watched his sister as she sat, her hands busy and her eyes smiling at her thoughts. He had more than the wisdom of his ten tall wistful years, but he could not keep silence much longer. He had spoken to Theodocia that morning and been bidden to hold his tongue about it. Theodocia was a fool, of course, but Jude was not sure of himself. He hesitated.

"Jael."

The dreams turned tail and scuttled away. He saw them vanish.

"Jael, is it true that you will have to go and live in Richmond's house?"

Jael laid down the worn darned linen. "Richmond would have me go," she said, and added calmly, "but of course I'm not going."

Jude sat on his hands because they were shaking: the tension had been sharp and the relief too sudden.

"Are you sure, Jael?" he asked.

Jael knew the tones of his voice too well: she did not look at him, but answered promptly—"You and I and Richmond and Theodocia will all live here. I never meant to go away and leave you."

She was railing at herself bitterly because Jude had suffered for her indolent silence. Happiness had made her selfish: Theodocia said that God always punished greed. She thought—"Dear God, if I try not to be selfish, will you let me keep Richmond?" Poor Jael, that forgot God is too

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High to bargain. She folded her work and said aloud—"I'll go and see Richmond about it now."

She did not think Richmond would mind living at Trudesthorp, but a doubt nagged at her all the way across the moor. She found Richmond in his barn, and because she was afraid, took the shortest way with him. She had not the wit to hide her purpose, and said abruptly—"Richmond, I've come to tell you that I can't live in your house."

Richmond was unprepared. "You're not very polite," he said.

Jael was by now so nervous that she went on blindly. "I mean," she said, "that I don't want to. You see there's Jude—I couldn't leave him there alone."

"Let Jude come here."

"And Theodocia?" Jael said doubtfully.

Richmond's patience gave way abruptly. He had just concluded a long argument with his father. John Drew had agreed to Jael with reluctance and refused to have any cackling servant-women on the place. "If you must marry," said he, "marry and repent, but you shall not bring here an idle wife. An idle woman is the devil's handmaid." He was fond of these like saws, which he invented with an ingenuous ease.

The worldly wisdom of the argument whipped Richmond to fury. He became at one bound the fiercest of rebels against the infamous disillusion of age and all callous ageing men. He was hot and imperious, and ready to ride his romance at any windmill.

The older man said calmly—"When you're cooler come and talk to me again. A boy in love is a fool on horseback."

Richmond was left, swallowing the insult to his pride and raging furiously at the necessity.

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Now came Jael and in her ignorance made nothing of that man's monstrous slight. She was suggesting that he put it all aside as if he had never had to fight for his honour and hers. He tried to control his wrath.

"Theodocia?" said he unkindly. "Oh, by all means. Bring your father too—and his sweet familiar."

Jael put her hand to her breast in an instinctive gesture. She said—"Oh Richmond," and he, now furious with himself, added violently—"If you don't want to marry me, why not say so, instead of raising all these absurd obstacles?"

Jael's world had fallen about her. She stood amidst its ruins, a most desolate and imploring figure. Her head felt light and her throat was choking up.

"I thought you might live with us at Trudesthorp," she said painfully. "We have all the left wing for ourselves. No one can reach us from the other part of the house because Theodocia had a man put huge bolts and a staple on the door from the great hall—ever since Jude was—hurt." She stopped, because Richmond was looking at her with dislike.

"I'd sooner live in a ditch than live under the same roof as that vile old man," he said deliberately.

A sudden anger steadied Jael's voice. "If you so dislike the father, it amazes me how you can tolerate his daughter," said she.

Richmond made no answer, and Jael turned to look blindly from the window. She heard him cross the room. He stood beside her and pressed his cheek to hers. "Don't let's quarrel, Jael," he said queerly.

Jael waited. She saw herself turn slowly until her mouth touched his, and she was caught and held while the ice-cold pressure on her heart melted in his warmth. But still she stood rigid and unyielding. He had put her too far from

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him: she could not get back along so frail a bridge. Richmond drew away.

"There's no need to quarrel," Jael said hardly. She stayed a little longer, looking at Richmond's work, and then was ready to go. He came with her to the gate of the paddock. "Won't you kiss me, Jael?" he said then, and again she could not yield, though all her being cried for him. Why was he so calm? He did not care. She lifted a small unresponsive mouth.

Jael walked slowly home. The way from John Drew's house to Trudesthorp lay across the moor, and at a dip in the road she heard swift footsteps following her. She looked back and saw Richmond on the crest of the hill, running madly. He was breathless, with his hair blown wildly and his eyes hard and glittering. He stood and looked at her and said dreadfully—"This is the first time in my life I have been quite quite mad with anger. At first I thought I'd go and get drunk and make you loathe me and settle it, but it's not worth it. I've done everything on earth I can think of for you—lost my pride, everything. And you kissed me as if I were a damned monster. *Think of it!* You needn't have kissed me at all if you hadn't wanted to. I'd like to cry. I hope you're pleased I've told you. I'll never ask anything of you again." He paused and added in the same hard furious voice—"And I love you beyond words. Laugh at me if you like."

Then he turned and swung back up the hill, leaving Jael white and dumb in the middle of the road.

Near midnight Jael was kneeling, an exhausted little bundle, by her open window. She heard an owl crying in the fashion of the little owl that sat and cried ridiculously on a rail. Then she thought it odd an owl should cry so on the bare lawn below her window. She stood up to look out, and

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saw Richmond standing there, his lifted face white in the moonrays.

He waved a hand and called softly—"Look out, Jael. I'm coming up." She watched him scramble up the gnarled branches of the ivy to the wide stone parapet that ran over the gallery. Then, with fingers twisted in a tangle of thick lichened stems and feet groping like hands, he climbed perilously to the level of the window-sill.

He wore a most mischievous and adorable smile. "Don't I make a darling owl?" he whispered. Then he saw her face more clearly and his own changed. "Oh, my little sweet, what have you done to your dear face? You're all pale. You've been crying for me." He gripped the inside of the sill. "I'm coming in," he said softly. She stood back and he swung himself inside the room.

She caught her breath on a shuddering gasp when he took her to him. "You've never been to bed," he said. "You're shivering. You're as cold as death. Oh, Jael, Jael."

He chafed her hands and smoothed her hair back from her face; then picked her up and sat himself down on the wide, low sill. "Come right in to me," he whispered, "and let me get you warm. Oh you foolish little Jael. You foolish darling Jael. Did you mind so? Did you mind so, little love?" He nursed her, crooning over her and pressing soft light kisses on her hair and eyes. He stretched out a hand and twitched the quilt from the bed to wrap it round her, tucking her up and talking softly all the time, the little talk of mothers and lovers.

When she had ceased a little her shivering, he began to talk with a new seriousness. "You don't know how I hate myself, Jael." She put up a small cold hand to stroke his face. He drew it down, kissed it softly and put it back under the quilt. "I've tramped miles and miles trying to

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forget your face when I left you this morning. I was afraid to come and see you for fear I'd quite killed your love for me. I haven't done that, have I, darling?" He bent his head to the softness of her throat and felt the pulse that fluttered there so wildly. "And then I knew you'd be unhappy and perhaps crying, and I could bear it no longer. I had to come and find out." He paused again. "You're not angry with me for coming?"

She shook her head.

"You'll forgive me, Jael? I've been unspeakable, but I've been so wretched, too. I do want your forgiveness. And you know I'll come and live here—anywhere—so only that I can live with you, if you'll have me. Do you want me now you know what I'm like, Jael? I've been unkind to you: I might be again. I'm often selfish and irritable. I'll try very hard never to lose my temper so madly and unjustly, but oh Jael, I might fail. You see, I haven't anything to offer you, but I do love you and I'm so sorry for you, my little love."

He stopped and still she did not speak, so that his boy's heart failed him a little. "Jael," he whispered, "dear Jael, have I been *too* unkind? Do you want me to go and leave you?"

At that she turned her face to his arm and broke into a dreadful weeping. Her thin body was shaken and convulsed and when she tried to speak her tears choked her. "I did not mean to be hard," she said, "or cold."

He held her closer and more tenderly. "Little thing," he whispered.

She went on trying to speak. "You see, it seems strange that you should want me. I hardly believe it, and if you push me from you, I can't come back at once." She clung to him.

He soothed her and said at last—"Will you promise me

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something, Jael?" He tilted her head back. "Promise your lover one thing he asks."

"Anything he asks," Jael murmured.

"Only to trust him," the boy said. "Never, never to doubt that he loves you, so wicked, so foolish, so unkind as he is. But never never unloving. Will you promise?" He dropped his voice to the smallest whisper. "You'll be my wife very soon: I'll be an awfully good husband."

With a sigh of happiness she relaxed in his arms, and he held her until his muscles ached and his hands grew numb and very cold. Looking at her, he saw that she was drowsy and heavy-eyed. "You should be asleep now, my wife," he murmured, and getting carefully to his feet he laid her in her bed and drew the clothes round her.

"Would you like this thing off?" he said, pulling lightly at the collar of her dressing-gown. She shook her head. He knelt beside her and laid his head close to hers. "Darling little love," he whispered, "I do promise—with all the strength of my body and mind—that I will be kind to you. I love you most amazingly, Jael." He kissed her gently. "Are you warm now, dear heart?" he said. "I've been good to you to-night, haven't I?"

She turned herself to press kisses on his hands.

He stood for a moment looking down at her and she saw how white and tired was his young face. And long after he had gone, dropping recklessly from one hold to the next, she lay and thought of him with an awed and passionate tenderness. "So thoughtless as you are," she told herself. "You are not fit to be loved so." She fell asleep thinking that since Richmond never knew his mother it would be doubly sweet to mother him, and in the morning wrote her second letter.

"Darling Richmond, you must be very tired this morning and I am wondering whether you have proper things to eat.

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Theodocia says a man needs more care than a baby. When I am your wife I will take great care of you. I am very good at taking care of people, though you might not think so after my foolish behaviour. But, indeed, dear dear Richmond, I would to wrap you in my love as last night you wrapped me in my quilt and made me warm."

Thereafter she began to prepare for her marriage. Trude had been told, and grumbling violently, had produced a handful of gold which he flung at Theodocia with a "Get out, daughter of the horse leech." And Theodocia, who had been afraid he might ask for Jael, took it and was glad. Mrs. Bellber rode over from Starcross to promise a gift of house linen, and afterwards brought as ample a store as she would have given with her own girl, fine damask and fine linen, pile on pile. Jael could not speak. She touched the things with one finger, and Mrs. Bellber was reminded of the wondering child that said—"You have a lovely house." Very little changed, in five years, the face that was lifted to hers now, a child's face still, and heartbreakingly radiant.

"You are like Mercy in the book," Jael said earnestly, "that thought always of giving to others. How God must love you."

Mrs. Bellber smiled wryly. "If giving was the hardest thing His creatures had to do, we'd need no parsons to frank us into heaven."

She bent stiffly to touch Jael's cheek with her hard old lips. "I'll ha' the boy's life if he's unkind to you."

Jael laughed gayly. "Richmond wouldn't be unkind."

"Richmond's a man," said Mrs. Bellber.

"All men aren't unkind," Jael answered gently.

"Men are what they always were," the gaunt woman retorted. "If you listen to me—you won't, of course, being a fool and young—you'll expect little and be the less disappointed." . . .

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The left wing of Trudesthorp had round its own large hall two sitting-rooms, the great gallery, and seven big bedrooms. The lower rooms were all panelled: the oak had never been stained and had by time and much rubbing achieved a curious soft tone. These rooms had never suffered as the main wing suffered: the furniture, which was almost all walnut, had some of it been new and some old when Nicholas Trude put it there, but was all of an austere charm. So was the faded tapestry of the heavy curtains at the windows and the worn shabby brocade of the big chairs. Jael's own room was the largest of the two rooms over the great gallery. Its windows looked out at Blackacres and over the wall into Janet Trude's garden. It had all the sun that shone on Trudesthorp and its grey walls were, like the oak downstairs, of a pleasant and kindly hue.

The moor wind blew cool and fragrant through its many windows as Jael made it ready against her marriage. Together she and Theodocia scrubbed and polished the whole wing. Jael worked very hard, with such unstinting joy that the old walls seemed to catch and hold her happiness in their umbered depths.

Mrs. Hender brought fine filmy lawn and helped Jael to sew for herself. She brought also a length of fine soft cloth and some sprigged silk that Jael thought more beautiful than anything she had seen. They made frocks and all the things that Jael had wanted without knowing that she wanted them. As they worked Elizabeth talked to the dreaming girl. She had not known Jael as she knew Jude, because all the three years that Jael went with Jude to the vicarage she was away seeking life and strength in southern France. She thought that she had never seen anything so fresh and gay since she came to this lonely moor country and she was almost afraid for her, as we all must be afraid for gay, lovely and courageous youth,

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knowing that gaiety, courage and beauty have challenged unwittingly the jealous gods since man first lifted his head from the saving dust.

Elizabeth Hender talked. From the fragrant mansions of her mind she brought a store of wise and gentle thoughts, all that she had learned of life during the years she had helped John Hender to labour in his stony vineyard. Her own lost hopes of children she showed Jael, and the patience and courage which she lent to her husband when his own flagged in the weariness of work done and undone and painfully begun again. She had a sure faith in goodness and a mind so serene and generous that Jael found herself revealing the shy secrets of the young and solitary girl.

"Do you think," she said once, "that you would have loved your children as much as you love Mr. Hender? I'm quite quite sure I couldn't love any child one-half so much as I love Richmond."

Elizabeth Hender smiled. "There is no limit set to love," she said. "You would not need to rob Richmond for his child."

"Richmond is a child," Jael said wisely. "He needs to be taken care of and loved very wisely."

"You are both children," the older woman said, "and children cannot always be kind and wise. I will pray for your happiness."

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CHAPTER IV

MAY, and Jael's marriage day. She was to walk across the fields and by the path along the beckside to the village. She had planned it so. The service was at eight o'clock. Only Jude and Elizabeth Hender and Mrs. Bellber and Theodocia would be there. Jael laid ready the sprigged silk because it was the most beautiful thing she had, the leghorn hat, thick ivory silk stockings and narrow black shoes bought with John Trude's grudging gift.

She got up at six and gathered armsful of the double white lilac from the trees round the upper lawn. Her room was full of scented violets that Richmond had brought the day before—riding into the nearest town to get them—and downstairs, the flushed white flowers of the hawthorn gleamed in the shadows of the panelled rooms. Jude had gathered this for her. "Bring in may, bring in ill-luck," said Theodocia, and was for throwing it out, but Jael kept it.

The day was one of those warm golden days in late May when the sharp clear loveliness of Spring is touched to a new and ardent glory. The sky before dawn was a white flame burning into the passionate blown crimson of the east. The little wind that blows at sunrise off the moors stirred the burdened may trees in the valley and sent gusts of heady scent across the lawns and desolate gardens of the house. The may filled the valley and flung a warm white radiance round the fields: it braved the lower slopes of the moor and flowed up the narrowing vales to the inland plains and thence in sturdy

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fragrant loveliness swept, a foamy tide, to the farthest corners of this land.

Jael and Jude walked slowly and in silence through the fields. Jude wished to himself that there had been music somewhere for Jael, and then thought that there was music, an earth-wide bridal song.

Happy Jael, happy child. The morning smiles upon the hills; the trees strike green and golden shafts of light across the path; the hedges bend with blossom in the wind that lays a soft caressing hand on Jael's hair and on the folds of her gown; the stream in the valley laughs and kisses its banks and tiny islands, the lark breaks his small heart to make her melody, the anxious spider hangs across the hedgerows a cloke of jewelled gossamer, even the busy mole hurrying through the ditch pauses to show her his grey wedding garment, and the very air smells sweetly where she goes. Happy Jael.

They have reached the bend of the path. The squat belfry of the church shows through the trees. Jael stands still. Her eyes as they rest on Jude are troubled. He touches her hand. "What are you thinking?" he says gently.

"We've been so happy, you and I."

"Yes." Jude nods his fair head.

"Do you know," the girl said slowly, "I almost think I'd like to go away—just you and I—to some quiet place a long way off, where there isn't anyone else."

Jude looked at her in open-eyed surprise. "But where could we go, dear Jael?" he said at last.

Jael smiled at that. "We couldn't go anywhere, darling."

The boy waited, trying to follow. "Why do you want to go away?"

She shook her head. "I don't know."

How should she know? The tides of our own hearts, that hide so many secrets in their bosoms, flow and bear us from

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coast to unknown coast as a leaf is born in mid-current, now caught at rest, now whirled and spun and beaten, now drawn down and foundering.

Jael did not know what foreboding stirred so faintly in her heart, stirred and died. She caught Jude's hand.

"Richmond will be waiting for us," she said softly. With clear untroubled eyes and a smile curving her glorious mouth, she went with him towards the village.

The golden day passed and the kindly night put out her nrst few stars. Richmond and Jael stood together in the orchard. Jael leaned against him and he held her in the curve of his arm. She lifted her head.

"The world looks very wide," she murmured.

"For you it's as wide as my arms, and wide as your breast for me."

Jael muffled her soft laughter against his shoulder. "Dear Richmond," she said. "What jolly things you think of to say to me."

He lifted her against him in a swift caress. "Don't laugh at me," he murmured. "I won't have it."

He kissed her mouth and her wide grave eyes: her hands found his and clung to them. "Dear," he said, and "Dear wife," and loosed her hands to draw her closer still.

"You're not afraid now, my Jael?" he said.

She shook her head.

"Nor unhappy? Nor lonely?"

She held him fast. "Never afraid again. Never never unhappy."

"No one lives without sometimes being unhappy," Richmond said, "but since we are together, unhappiness won't matter now. I'll comfort you and you will comfort me." He was holding her so closely now that her body ached: she did not mind while she could watch his dear mouth and kind eyes that

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loved her so. "Oh," Richmond cried, "it doesn't matter what dreadful thing happens now."

Foolish Richmond, to fling his rash challenge on such a night.

Jael shivered. "You're growing cold," he said. "In this thin gown."

"It's a nice frock," said Jael shyly.

"It's a perfect frock," the boy answered. "When I saw you coming towards me this morning in the sunshine you looked so lovely and adorable that I could hardly bear it. I thought they must all hear my heart hammering against my ribs." Richmond hushed his voice. "You are lovelier now. I can just see your face, like a white glimmer in the darkness—all starry eyes and dark crown of hair. Dear eyes you have, Jael—the dearer for the sweet soul in them." He drew her across the grass to the thick hedge. Spilling incense like wine, the may stooped her branches over them. "I shall never smell hawthorn again," said Richmond, "or the clean jolly scent of wood violets without remembering you as you are now, so fair—without flaw, a garden enclosed, my dear, my love." He tried to see her eyes.

She found nothing to answer but foolish little words and broken phrases like shy kisses.

The hill wind heard their vows and the stars looked down at them across the cold spaces, two children crept together in the vast menacing night.

Time passes, says Janet Trude's sundial, *but memories remain.* Richmond stands on the threshold of Jael's room. It is a place of fragrant shadowy spaces: the curtains stir softly by the windows. A low-hung moon, the thief of night, has made magical the sleepy earth. But Richmond does not see these things. He sees the candles set like jewels in the quiet room, and Jael kneeling, where their warm glimmering light falls like a benediction on her hair. His heart fills with a

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burdened tenderness that seems deeper than his love and kinder than desire. He cannot speak or move to her, for love has sealed his lips and made him blind. She lifts her head, and seeing him comes straight to him, and to his arms gives all the young grace and budding beauty of her, love for his love and worship for his worship.

The candles are blown out. The moon, the thief of night, climbs, climbs slowly and makes magical the room.

Richmond sleeps, his head resting on his arm. But Jael is wide awake: her light breath fans his cheek. She lays the softest possible touch on his eyelids and on his mouth, about which still hovers the shadow of a smile. She takes his narrow face between her hands, and with a serious steadfast care notes every detail of the smooth skin, dark ruffled hair, and boyish grace, and hides them in her heart. She ponders gravely on this great gift that has been placed in her two hands. Lover and wife she is, allowed to serve with her body and all her mother-wit and tenderness this dear Richmond of the gentle hands and gracious ways.

She stooped to kiss him, sighed, smiled and fell asleep, her hand slipped in his.

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BOOK III

"Now at the end of this valley was another, called the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and Christian must needs go through it because the way to the Celestial City lay through the midst of it."—*Pilgrim's Progress.*

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CHAPTER I

FOUR years they had. Richmond was strong as a young lion, and during these years his strength was inexhaustible. He worked for his father, when there was anything for him to do, and the rest of the time he worked for himself, in one of the great Trudesthorp barns that he was able to turn into a fine *atelier*. In spring and summer he began at five and worked till sundown. He made innumerable clay studies and a myriad drawings. Jael was not only his model, but his faithful assistant, knitting her brows over the perpetual moistening of cloths and all the other odd and wearisome tasks of a *garçon d'atelier*. She helped him to cast in lead a small exquisite faun, mad with joy and mischief, that he had made for his uncle in Leeds—and three adorable babies. She helped him make plaster casts and comforted him when they failed, as for a long time they almost invariably did. Richmond, who was patient and sweet-tempered under the strain of a long day's fatiguing labour, quickly grew irritable under these failures, and once lost his temper so badly that he stormed crazily up and down the barn. "Vile, despicable, filthy job," he shouted, "and I such a clumsy fool that not a workman in my father's yard but would make a better showing." He was splashed with plaster, yellow and white, and he kicked over a bucket of clay water and smashed a bottle of olive oil. Jael said nothing, and Richmond, halting his destruction in mid-career, flung himself across the room in a fury of remorse. But Jael was laughing, and turned to him a malicious mirthful face, so that he was

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amazingly disconcerted and after that kept his temper better.

He studied and experimented ceaselessly. He worked over the clay with an unwearying obstinate patience, until under the firm contours of a limb it seemed that the nerves throbbed and the blood ran swiftly. To his cunning in modelling, he added his profound knowledge of anatomy and the serene patience of the faithful craftsman. His work grew better. He knew that it did. His grandfather came from Switzerland and was pleased, though he offered not a single word of praise.

During this time Richmond's work began to slough its immaturities and show some qualities of its glorious maturity.

He talked to Jael about it. "You see," he told her, "one must model so as to get the light. Look at your hand. It's a series of ups and downs, hills and hollows. Every one of them takes the light at a different angle, at a thousand angles, as you move. It's soft and firm, it breathes, it lives, and draws its life from within. The power that modelled it knew its job. That's what I have to get, Jael—beauty that begins *under* the skin, in nerve and muscle. Get that right first, so that when you look at the surface, it's living flesh you see, and not a glove, a mask. If any fool ever talks to you about the cold beauty of a sculptured thing, tell him to get out and make paving stones for a living. Sculpture isn't cold."

He was modelling her head, and studying it from every possible angle as he did so. With the point of a penknife he brought out the curves and recesses of its youthful softness until —crude and rough—it lived between his hands. "You've got to see all round a thing," he said. "There mustn't be the knife edge of a point where you can look at it and see only dead clay. And it's got to melt and flow, not be harsh and crude, like this is now. Out of the most enormous effort you've got to get the sense of effortless flowing strength—just as when you move,

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beloved, a thousand things happen at once to make that one supremely lovely curve."

"Richmond," Jael said, "do you really think of all that when you're working?"

He screwed up his queer tilted eyes in amusement. "No, I don't, you little bad thing," he said, "but I know it—inside my fingers and underneath my thoughts I know it all the time."

And once he said to her—"Everything that can move is beautiful. Beauty is born of a miracle, the miracle of movement. Think how easily you close your fingers and what centuries of effort passed to bequeath you that ease. If I could work for ten centuries, Jael, I might learn to do some clumsy miracles of my own."

He made countless clay studies of Jael. After a while he began models that were more than studies, though he thought of them only as experiments. He made one of Jael dancing, a light poised thing that seemingly grew from the ground as a flower grows, free and yet balanced in sure and exquisite equilibrium. With this he was more than commonly dissatisfied, and abandoned it. He made a study of Jael with her gown pushed off one shoulder so that one small budded breast half showed. This was a laughing Jael with lifted throat and ardent eyes. After this he began studies for what afterwards became *The Lover,* though he himself called it only *A Girl.* Arms stretched a little back to keep the balance, Jael stood poised, with lifted face, and mouth that offered itself to be kissed. The slender naked body strained up and forward in a quivering ecstasy of joy. There was that in her radiant face that stabbed and hurt, a joy too great to be borne. Her body had the sweet, strange mingling of austerity and soft sensuous loveliness that only the body of a very young and

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beautiful girl can have. The modelling, at once firm and voluptuous, revealed the smooth texture of the youthful flesh, throbbing with the pulse of life and perfect strength.

Richmond worked on this until he had the idea of modelling the lovers of Dante's Hell at a brief moment when the torture ceasing, they remember their love that was so sweet while it endured. As Richmond saw them, they had serene eyes. The lines of anguish were too deep on brow and mouth to vanish in that fleeting respite, but it was with no tortured straining that they met, and touched lips to yearning lips. Their tranced bodies rested together in a strange, tranquil peace, as if eternity lay calm before them and pain would not come again.

Many months Richmond worked on this, and on his studies for it, his most audacious effort. Then came a fortnight when he had no time for the Trudesthorp barn, and one day when Jael came to untwist the clothes she found that Francesca fell asunder. The clay had been too wet. While she stood looking in speechless grief at the wreckage of clay and the grotesque armature, Richmond came in. He looked for a long moment at the mutilated thing. To Jael an endless anguished moment. She tried to speak and could not. Richmond moved at last. He put his arm round her shoulders and laid his face against hers. "Poor little Jael," he said gently. "Are you disappointed?"

Jael seized him with shaking clutching hands. "Richmond," she moaned, " my fault. It is my fault, isn't it? The cloths must have been too wet. Oh, Richmond, Richmond."

But he only held her gently and shut her mouth with his. "No one's fault, darling," he murmured. "See what a lot of things we've lost through the clay getting too wet or too dry."

"Nothing like this," Jael said.

"This doesn't matter any more than the others," he assured her.

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A choked sob escaped Jael. "If only we could afford to have them cast."

"They're only experiments, little love. Why do you fret over them? I'll do far better things. These are only to teach me. Don't you see?"

But Jael could not understand, and grieved secretly for Paolo and Francesca.

Some months previously, John Drew, that silent, grudging man, had arranged and paid for a plaster moulder to take two plaster casts of *The Lover*. He was proud of Richmond, but an obscure fierce self-pride kept the other under and stifled its struggling impulse. That impulse now freed itself amazingly to prick John Drew into another offer. He wanted to have *The Lover* cast in bronze. This Richmond was reluctant to allow, but at last gave way to Jael's ardent pleading. He went himself to the foundry and lent a hand in the casting, sweating blood both then and during the hours of waiting to know whether it had escaped ruin. He was lucky. *The Lover* not only escaped ruin, but came forth miraculously perfect. Richmond found a new joy in its gleaming surfaces over which he spent weeks working patiently with small files. . . .

In a hot autumn the little *garçon d'atelier* drooped. Richmond watched over her with a strange sensitive care. Theodocia even remonstrated with him. "Children have been born before," said she. "You'll make the maid afraid." After that Richmond hid his anxiety. He let her work for him until, her energy flagging, she wandered unhappily away. Then he followed, and gathering her up in his arms, rested her weary limbs and soothed her with a gentle murmer of talk until sometimes she fell asleep.

Once he made some sketches of her, with the half-formed notion of modelling a Spring slighter and less sophisticated than the lovely creatures of Botticelli's dream. But when he

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showed them to Jael she crimsoned even over her white throat, and entreated him to destroy them. He could not understand: more than a little hurt, he tried to reason with her. "Why are you offended, Jael?" he said. "I love your dear body. I made these in love of it. You've never minded."

Jael shook her head. "No, no," she repeated. "I can't bear that. You must destroy them. Please, please, dear Richmond."

He tore them across, choking down a queer sense of humiliation and resentment. Jael watched him.

"Do you mind very much?" she asked unhappily.

He comforted her at once. "I'm grieved they hurt you," he said. "I wouldn't have hurt your dear funny pride for anything on earth, my Jael."

She wanted to tell him that it was not pride that choked her, and could not. He was so kind: she tried to efface the memory of her protest from his mind by working with redoubled vigour in the studio. Several weeks later she came upon a new and careful sketch of her that he had made and hidden under piles of paper. She caught her breath. He had not been able to resist making it: that hurt, and the vision of his hiding it away hurt intolerably. After a while she began to accuse herself. "It is my fault," she said, "to have asked so unreasonable a thing."

Towards the middle of December, Richmond went to Leeds. When he had gone, Jael was seized with a sudden fear that he would come back too late. She pleaded with Theodocia to walk down to the village and telegraph for him. Jude was away on his pony and Theodocia hesitated. "Why would you have him back now, with a se'night to go?" she grumbled, but the young girl looked at her out of such shadowed burning eyes that at last she agreed. It was early afternoon and the sky was heavy with snow. Theodocia pointed up. "If that comes

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down, I shall ha' to stay in the village the night," she said. "And then what will 'ee do?"

"You can come back in the morning," Jael pleaded. "I don't mind being left to-night. But I want Richmond."

When Theodocia had gone, a ludicrous muffled figure, Jael wandered restlessly round her house. She wandered out on to the lawn, and had at once the sense of stepping into tense hushed spaces. Silence pressed her from the wall of sky that sprang from the rim of Blackacres. The hills were savage and drawn in. In the brittle air a snapped twig rang like a gun shot. Jael began to be afraid of the adventure in front of her. She crossed her hands on her breast in the childish instinctive gesture that Richmond laughed at and secretly adored.

Far below in the valley fields she saw Jude, a small black moving figure. She called to him and the intense cold suffocated the words in her throat. She wished he would hurry.

When Jude did come he found a Jael with cheeks aflame and dilated eyes. It had already begun to snow, and through the afternoon and early evening the snow fell in thick blinding clouds. "Theodocia won't come," Jael said. "She couldn't climb the hill road in this."

Jude followed her round the house as she drifted from room to room. Once she turned and took his hand between her small hot hands and said—"You know, darling, we ought to have run away that morning. It would have been far better."

Jude was frightened, but he coaxed her back to her own room, and to distract her looked up the trains that Richmond might catch. "If he got Doxie's wire in time, Jael, he could leave Leeds at four. No, that's no good. That train doesn't join up. He'll have to come right through on the night mail and drive back. He'll be here for lunch. That will please you, won't it, Jael darling?" Jude looked up anxiously.

She smiled and pushed the heavy hair from her forehead.

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"Let me take it down for you," Jude begged. She leaned back in her chair and he unfastened the long plaits so that they lay on her shoulders: now she looked so small and frightened that Jude forgot his own uneasiness: he sat on the floor beside her chair and held her hand.

Hours slipped past. Jude, peering across the firelit room, thought that the snow was no longer falling. He wondered if Jael were asleep, when suddenly she started up in her chair and wrung her hands. Her eyes were wide and wild. "Jude," she said, "oh, Jude, Jude. They've all left us. I'm afraid. I'm most dreadfully afraid."

He strove desperately to quiet her. "It's only just one night, darling," he said. "Richmond will be here in the morning—and Theodocia too."

But she pushed away his hands and stood up, steadying herself against the chair.

"Listen, Jude," she said, "you must go and get someone."

Jude crossed to the window. "It's not snowing very fast now," he said doubtfully. "But why must I go? You'll be alone." She was silent, staring at him, and he said—"I'll go if you say I must, Jael."

He began to pile logs on the fire. She said queerly—"No, don't leave me alone. But someone must go down to the inn and tell Theodocia to come quickly." She gripped the boy's wrist. "Jude, dear Jude," she implored him, "you must help me."

"But me, there's only Martha," Jude said.

Jael sank back into her chair. "Send Martha, then," she said, and shut her eyes.

Jude went slowly downstairs. Terror had him by the throat. He dragged his legs. He would have to go into the other house. It was night and he would have to go into the other house.

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He would go into the great hall, and there the Beast would be waiting for him. Would move and snarl and spring. The boy's heart stood still. He leaned against the heavy bolted door that led into the hall and choked back the cold nausea of fear. Straining and dragging, he drew the great bolts and pulled the staple. The door swung open on to darkness: on the distant hearth a small flame winked and the sap from a green log hissed and spluttered.

Jude crossed the floor: past the great bed he went and through into the outer passage. Not until then did he stop and lean against the wall and draw a shuddering breath. Then he flew down the passage and in the second odorous kitchen found Martha dozing in a corner. He shook her frantically. She scrambled to her feet, opening one malevolent eye. The other stayed obstinately shut. Jude felt a little sick, she was so horrid a sight. He had to tell her several times what she must do, and when at last she understood she would not budge. Mouthing, with claws before her face, she repeated—"Not Martha, not little Martha. She'd die of cold. Poor Martha."

Jude began to shout in his desperation. "You must go," he said, "Jael's ill. She'll die. I'll kill you if you don't go."

Sickeningly he became aware of John Trude standing behind him. For a moment his knees gave way: he steadied himself and then with a mad courage advanced upon his father and tugged at one monstrous arm. "Make her go," he implored. "Jael will die if someone doesn't come and help her."

Trude looked from him to the gibbering old woman. "Why wouldn't you go yourself, boy?" he asked abruptly.

"Jael wants me," Jude said earnestly.

Trude looked at Martha again. "Ud fall and break her neckbone," he said. "I'd better go myself."

Jude gasped. His father let out a sudden great roar. "Get

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out and tell the wench I've gone. My boots, old fool, my boots—fetch me my boots." Martha went leaping and hopping to find them.

How that tun of flesh, lame of one leg, and crazy in every joint, would cover the long icy road to the village, Jude could not suppose, but he ran back to Jael, forgetting the bolts of the great door in his mad haste, and as he ran heard behind him a frightful bellowing, shaken out of Trude by the effort of tugging on his high boots.

He saw that Jael was now less afraid. She smiled at him, and while he went downstairs to get tea for her, made herself ready for bed. Propped up on the pillows, she drank Jude's tea, and talked gaily until her voice died away in a little breathless gasp.

After that it did not seem very long to the boy before he was biting his lips to keep back the cry that rose to them. He clenched and unclenched wet fingers, and once his courage failed and he began a stammering prayer to her that she would not die and leave him, and promised her wildly to dust and sweep and work for her if she would but stay.

At last came Theodocia and helpers. Barely were they within doors when the storm came down again with shattering violence. It raged until three hours after midnight and all at once dropped. . . .

A white dawn, stepping softly on the heels of night. Jude looked down at Jael. She slept quietly with her head on one hand. Her light breath came and went through parted lips. He looked out across the moors. The bare earth, that bore no other flower, had wrapped itself in hushed tranquillity for the coming of Jael's son. Lightly, lightly it breathed now, dream-bound and still. Jude looked at Theodocia where she sat by the leaping fire. The child's face was shielded from the flames under a hooded shawl. Theodocia beckoned and Jude came

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softly. "That boy can't get here for hours," she whispered. Jude nodded.

But as she spoke, Richmond was coming, staggering like a drunken man, across the moor behind Trudesthorp.

He had taken the afternoon train, and towards eight was turned out at the station of a small country town. He meant to walk the twenty miles to Trudesthorp and rushed to demand a hasty supper at the inn. There, when he asked, they told him that the moor road was a good eight miles shorter than the road along the valley, but quite impassable in a snowstorm. "There be fools that ha' tried it," drawled the innkeeper. "Us ha' dug un out when the drifts melted."

Richmond laughed and set off for the moor. The first three miles up the long slope from the valley were easy going, though the snow, whipped by a racing norther, stung and blinded him so that he stumbled off the road at every tenth yard or so. He felt gloriously fit and his muscles slid easily into the long loping stride of the moor man. When he topped the rise the wind took him round the knees and sucked his feet from under him. He dropped on the icy road and got up with a new respect for northers. Now he was advancing into the stronghold of the storm. The road degenerated into a cart track and he walked encompassed in a choking swirl of snow. For all that he was lucky, because the very wildness of the wind on these swept heights kept the snow from lying, except in vast drifts. He could feel the sodden rutted earth under his feet. In his haste he blundered off the track, but casting back to the right found it again. After that, knowing too well the danger of losing the path, he walked carefully, feeling the ground with each foot. The delay maddened him: he became convinced that Jael needed him sorely. He saw her left by some accident alone in that desolate house. "She's so little and young," he thought, "and she'll be so frightened. She won't understand why I

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haven't come." He ran a few desperate yards and rolled headlong into one of the shallow pits that cover the moors. The shock of the black icy water brought him to his senses, and he began to look for the track with a methodical deliberation. It eluded him: he pushed on, hoping against hope that he was walking in the right direction. Once he fell into a drift and scrambling out of that, stood for a few seconds trying to think. The drift lay against a stack of peat and seeing that, he thought he could not be far from the road. He crept round to the lee of the stack and there leaned, getting his breath. After a moment it seemed to him that the snow was slackening. He shielded his eyes and looked up, and almost thought he saw a dark drift of sky. The thought gave him new vigour and he set off again, following along what seemed a very narrow path. Ten minutes later the snow had almost ceased to fall and he stumbled on to the track.

After this he went on quickly. The wind that racked him with a numb painful cold needed only endurance to face. He began to be pleased with himself, but for the nagging thought of Jael's need.

At last he reckoned that he must be within seven miles of Trudesthorp. He had got his second wind now and was fairly striding along the sodden path. Without warning the storm came down on him as if the heavens had opened. He was buffeted from side to side, knocked down and once plucked clean off his feet and flung ten yards across the moor. He got up again, dazed and breathless. The track was quite lost now and he went on, blind, dogged and unable to think for the roaring of the storm in his ears. He began to descend, and for a while imagined that he had reached the top of Nethermoor and was coming down by the house. The sense of something near him in the darkness halted him: he took two steps and ran into a black sour-smelling wall. He had wandered to the

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foot of Narrow Stone, that strange peak of limestone sticking out of Nethermoor like a monstrous tooth, three sides lapped by a wide sullen pool and the fourth guarded by a devil's nest of piled and jagged rocks.

At that a kind of cold madness seized Richmond. Behind the band of pain that pressed across his eyes his brain was cool and quiet. He knew that Jael was in danger. At the other side of those bared black teeth the road ran straight to Trudesthorp. He had ridden past Narrow Stone a thousand times. He drove back the thought of Jael on her mare, turning a laughing face to challenge his slower stupid bay. He would go crazy if he thought of her so. He steadied himself with the sound of his own voice. "If I turn aside to grope a way round I might never come upon the road." He set out to cross the rocks.

Crawling, climbing, hanging sometimes by his hands in the darkness when his foot stepped out on to nothing, slipping on narrow icy ledges, bleeding from countless cuts, he kept on. Once when he emerged round the corner of a large rock the wind twitched him up and tossed him into a narrow gully, where he lay for several minutes. He felt horribly alone. These rocks belonged to the spirits of the upper air that had neither malice nor pity for the mortal fool. He got up, and went a little further on hands and knees. Then the ground fell away under him and he rolled down a bare stony slope on to the road.

He had been over three hours coming through that place.

He lay huddled against the wind. He was at the limit of his endurance. He lay there until the thought of Jael brought him to his feet. Reeling and falling, he set off down the road, and as he went his tortured muscles eased up and he gathered a little speed. He hardly noticed that the storm had ceased, but when under the paling sky he saw Trudesthorp below him, he

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became aware that all round him was quiet. The white earth looked gentle. Weariness fell from him and but that his legs were weak under him he would have run. He stopped and bathed his face in the snow and went on.

Jael saw him when she woke. He was bending over her, and he closed his eyes because the light that woke in hers dazed and blinded him. "Dear Richmond," she said. "They said you couldn't come. I love you so."

He stayed with her until Theodocia came and laid her hand on his shoulder. "You'm soaking wet," she said crossly. "You'll take your death."

"It snowed," Richmond said mildly. He was too tired and too happy to argue with Theodocia.

He would not go until he had seen Jael drink a cup of tea, and fed her tiny fingers of bread and butter so clumsily that she laughed at him, a small ghost of a laugh. "I was so brave," she said, looking up at him.

She pulled his head down to whisper in his ear. "I wish you had been here to know how brave I was, and how dreadfully it hurt me." Suddenly shy, she turned her face away, so that he had to kiss the tip of her ear before Theodocia thrust him out.

He went to bed and slept like a log, and when he woke remembered, as if it had been waiting on the threshold of his thoughts, her naive childish wish.

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CHAPTER II

JAEL'S son was two years old when Richmond left Trudesthorp, and save for two brief visits, bitter-sweet like passion in a dream, did not come back to it again for five years.

He went to the wars, with many others as young and as exultant in their youth, and by whose passing, many roads—in all the country and in all towns and cities—were made sacred. Life was still a wonder and a promise to them, their eyes were not wise nor their feet weary, and they had laughter on their lips.

The months of his absence passed for Jael like a dream, a dim enigmatic dream. She was spellbound in a mediæval fantasy. The walls of a mediæval town girdled her round. She was held in its narrow streets and the air was darkened with press of fears and rumours. Richmond, coming back, scattered the grotesque shadows that closed round her the thicker when he went.

On the morning of his last day Jael woke early. She lay looking through the window: the sky was the colour of a dove's wing and the moor lay dark and brooding: pools of yellow light were spilled between the eastern clouds.

Richmond slept as he so often did, with his arm crooked round his head. Jael thought—"I must remember him like that," but her mind was numb and she lifted her hand to her throat. She put out a hand to touch him and drew it back. He must not wake yet. While he slept he had no world save

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her eyes. He was captive and safe from all harm. "I love you as if I'd made you myself," she whispered, and then she thought that it might be wrong to love Richmond's body as she loved it, its youth and slenderness and strength. If God were to punish her by spoiling it—— She lifted her face in terror. "You couldn't do that," she whispered. "You couldn't hurt him to punish my—idolatry. Oh God, dear God—no."

Richmond was awake and looking at her. "Why are you sitting up?" he asked sleepily. His eyes closed. "Nurse your boy, Jael," he said lazily. He turned his face into the hollow of her arm and smiled. She sat very still, holding him and repeating her foolish soundless prayer. "Do not let him be torn and hurt. I have taken such care of his body. *You* take care of it now." His dark head lay below her heart and she touched the foreshortened curve of his chin and smooth thin cheek.

At breakfast, Richmond ate a prodigious quantity of Theodocia's tiny sausages. He talked nonsense and Jael laughed.

He had refused to let her come with him to the station. They walked across the kitchen gardens to the road. There Richmond stopped. "No further," said he, and looked at her.

He kissed her. She was cold, and at his touch she began to tremble violently. Her hands closed on his arms and her eyes were wide and dreadful. She swayed.

"Jael," the boy said sternly.

Jael's hold relaxed. She smiled. Richmond took a step away and then turning back, took her and crushed her until the buttons of his clumsy greatcoat bruised her through her gown. She made no cry, and when he looked back at the bend of the road he saw her still standing, with her dress blown about her, a straight, slender thing.

He was out of sight. The road was empty now, and quiet, save for the droning of bees in the heather and the crying of birds round the eaves of the great barn. She lifted her eyes

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to the hills that fell away to north and south; she saw the dip of valleys and the green pastures beside the running streams; she saw the brave sweep of moorland that swelled and dipped and rose again under the wide, clean sky.

She endured a blind tearing agony. That passed. Theodocia came calling.

"David wants you," the old woman said. . . .

Richmond got his commission, and came home once more—in the summer of the year. He was a very debonair young officer, and Jael was deliciously shy of him. He teased and laughed at her until she confessed haltingly that she found him changed. "Changed?" said Richmond, and put an arm round her.

Jael flushed. "Oh, no," she murmured, "but you look so different, that this—this——" she glanced delicately at his embracing arm—"seems hardly right."

He laughed, the young giant, until Jael shook him in her mortified vexation. "Mercy," he gasped, "the child feels improper. Jael darling, when do you begin to grow up?" The shamed tears in her eyes sobered him. He rubbed his head on her arm. "Don't be angry, Blossoms, but you know you are adorably funny." His eyes glinted with mischief. "How old are you now, Jael?"

"Twenty-three."

He sighed. "You look sixteen."

"Are you sorry?" Jael asked softly.

He shook his head, its thick dark hair now unwontedly sleek and smooth. "It has been an abiding fear to me that I'd come back and find the little girl gone, and a strange woman in her place."

He would not go near the barn and his eyes darkened when Jael tried to persuade him. "I won't remember all that," he said. "It was all wrong, and it has nothing to do with life."

"Some of it was rather lovely," Jael said sadly.

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"Lovely," he began—and paused. "Lovely. Like a song in a charnel house. Without sense or meaning. A mockery."

He would not talk of his life in France, but he talked a good deal of another young officer. Richmond had never had a friend of his own age and he found this new comradeship very good. He told Jael queer adventures they had shared, and related Paul's exploits, many and odd. "That boy," Richmond said, "doesn't know what fear is. When the rest of us are hanging on to our courage by the eyelids and only kept from running away because it's safer to stay where we are, Paul can laugh and remember something funny that happened to him when he was sent down to Corps Head-quarters with a message. He's only nineteen and as brave as a lion—and gay—" Richmond's eyes smiled at his memories. Jael watched him, and being wiser than her years understood that here was something no woman could share with a man, not even she with Richmond.

"When I send your next box out, I'll put an extra cake in for Paul," she said shyly, and was rewarded by Richmond's pleasure in her readiness to lay gifts on Paul's shrine.

Richmond had not told her when his leave would be up. She woke one cold dawn to find him standing beside her, fully dressed, even to the high brown boots that were his chiefest vanity. Her eyes widened in fear. "Not—not to-day?" she said.

"I've a car coming to take me to catch the mail train," he told her.

He had made the tea: he gave her a cup and sat beside her on the bed to drink his own. "Look, darling," he said, "I've cut two slices of bread—the thick for me and the thin for you. You *must* eat your piece. You've no idea how carefully I cut it. Why, I could see the knife through it, and I said to myself—'Jael *will* be pleased with you: you're the cleverest husband in England.'" He cut her bread into fingers and played

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an old game with them. "The long thin smart piece is me, the little soft one is Blossoms; there's Jude, and David, and the end piece with the bulge is John Trude. Wife, eat your bread."

Jael laughed and caught her breath, and tried to obey him. When he saw that she could not eat, he took her plate from her and sat putting the long dark hair back from her face. "Darling," he said, looking not at her, but at his own busy hand, "I've wanted to tell you before I went this time. We've been so happy, you and I. You're so dear a wife—more than wife—dear lover and joyous friend and tender child-mother. I've given you more than the love of my body, Jael. I've given my soul into you. You must take care of it for me." He smiled elvishly. "So dreadful if you mislaid it, darling." He slipped from the bed and waited a moment beside her. She, poor fool, could find no word to say—she never could when her love for him was filling her from heart to lips. He kissed her and was gone.

A month later Paul was killed. Killed horribly. Richmond seemed at the time to take it well. He wrote to Paul's mother, concealing the manner of the boy's death. He wrote to Jael, saying—Paul is dead—and did not answer her letter of sorrow.

He had, indeed, taken it very badly. His sleep was made dreadful with the vision of Paul dead. He thrust the memory back and down until even his dreams were rid of it. The effort cost. A strange cold lust of destruction possessed him. He was gentler than ever in speech, but the men had no liking for him. His Colonel decided privately that Drew was a little mad. "I've seen it happen before," he remarked. "The boy's gone numb in some part of his head. Devil take the fellah, he won't go on leave. Risks? He'll take any risk. He doesn't know what fear is. There's not a soft spot in him, but there's a dead one somewhere." . . .

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He was wounded and lay in a shell hole for the better part of two days and nights. A kind of cold rage possessed him at being beaten like this, and on the second night he crawled out, and after hours of crawling reached the skeleton of a mill. He had lost his sense of direction and could not guess whether he had gone right or whether he had crawled into German ground. He listened for an hour and at last heard a broad Lowland voice. He had reached an outpost of the Scots Guards. . . .

Months later he was back in England, changed over into the Air Force, and Jael, with four-year-old David, left Trudesthorp to come to him. The gates of the dream town closed behind her with a monstrous clang. She saw Theodocia's gaunt brooding face and heard Jude's voice, a little breathless, as if both were in the dream and she alone awake, awake and wild with joy.

David's cot, his carriage, and his large bear on wheels looked odd on the roof of a London taxi. They stayed the night in London with an ancient Drew cousin who lived bleakly in a vast house in Holland Park. From King's Cross to Holland Park is a long drive. Jael sat in awed silence and saw the velvet dusk of London stabbed with light.

Next day they left David with the cousin and went to buy Jael a frock. Jael was almost breathless with excitement.

"Are you sure we can afford one?" she asked.

In one of the quiet streets that lie between Oxford Street and St. James', she saw her frock in the window of a small shop. It was the only frock in the window, and it was certainly Jael's frock—lavender-grey and lined in odd places with the translucent delicate green of a sunset sky. It was as simple as the cunning of a genius could make it.

"This shop," said Jael, "belongs to a most remarkable looking person. I can see her through the curtain."

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Richmond followed Jael into the shop. The remarkable person looked, hesitated, looked again, and took her frock from the window without a flicker on her polished face. She led Jael away, and Richmond, leaning against a walnut tall-boy, regarded his boots.

Jael was coming back. He heard her soft step on the carpet and looked up. "Bless thee, Jael," said his thoughts, "thou art translated." Her white throat lifted from the shimmering green and her arms gleamed through a grey cloud. She had always a faery air because of the wide lovely mouth set in her small face, and the eyes that changed so with her mood. But Richmond had never seen her in a frock that set her loveliness on fire and transfigured it. Her eyes were now more blue than grey, and full of light, like a pool under a noon sky. Her small head was held royally. He wondered why when she was away he remembered only her kind ways and her childlike gaiety and forgot her beauty.

He said gravely—"You'd better have it."

"You like it?" Jael said.

"It is charming," he assured her.

She turned to the girl at her side. "I never asked how much it was."

Richmond interrupted her quickly. "Go and take it off, Jael, and I'll see about that."

Jael went obediently. "I'll pay for it now," he said.

It was twice as dear as Richmond's worst fears, and he had put his fears at a high figure. He abandoned reluctantly the thought of a green stone on a fine silver chain. Jael would have her dress, but she would wear it without that. Well, she would not miss it. He sighed. . . .

The dream had not gone. It had only changed. Everything in Jael's new restless hurried life was unreal. The sounds and sights of a confused and war-tossed country filled

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her days. She flitted through the confusion, a silent dreaming figure. Like a soft flame, her dream burned in her eyes. She had never seemed so like a gallant boy as during these grotesque disquieting months, and never felt so bewildered and troubled.

Even Richmond had changed. He was capricious and exacting. Sometimes he was unkind and angry. Then Jael's small face grew still and secret. She shut herself against him in an ironic silence, smiling her elfin smile, with an arm over the wound in her breast. And once he came and said—"I'm sorry, Jael. Forgive me." She was beside him in a swift rush, her slim body against his, gathering him in her arms and comforting him with every gentle word that came to her lips. She could not see his face because he kept it against her breast, but she was happy to have found the boy Richmond again, even for a little while.

She felt, during this time, that Richmond was sick and sore. She guessed at some deep hidden bitterness that all her love could not give her skill to heal. Richmond was hiding from her in a dark secret place. She knew the days when he drew farther into it and came back from it with grim lips and unkindly eyes. She could not touch him to help him. He eluded her.

Once at night he talked to her about the war. He held her in his arms and told her how Paul died. He did not spare her anything, and he told her other things, dreadful nightmare things. And he said—"Think of it, Jael. All that gaiety and strength and beauty. All the courage and kindness of men. The brain that could think of gods and music, and the hands that did clever things and kind things and loved women and were strong. All, all, all the meaning of life taken and crushed and trampled into a frightful senseless pulp—just as if a devil had meant to *prove* that there was no meaning—only cruelty and beastliness and death. Oh God, oh my God."

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Jael was sick and cold, but she kept herself close to him and held him tightly in her arms. He fell asleep and she lay thinking—"If I were wiser and knew more I could help you. There isn't anything I can do but love you. And that doesn't seem enough now."

There were days when it was enough and life, waking from dreams, stretched herself in the sun and laughed.

And then David fell ill. To Jael, who did not know how soon a child can collapse, he seemed to pass with incredible rapidity from fretful sickness to a terrifying stillness. He lay quietly in his cot. His face was pinched and waxen, and his breath was so weak that Jael could see no movement of his tiny breast.

He recovered, but very slowly, and as soon as he could bear it, Jael took him back to Trudesthorp. He grew better from the first day. In a week he was teasing Theodocia and roaring about the gardens like a young lion. Jael watched him with a breathless joy.

He was an engagingly charming child. He had Jael's amazing eyes set in Richmond's narrow face, and his hair was fair and very fine. Before his illness Jael had loved him in a curiously detached way, as if he were someone else's child given her to care for. And now that she loved him with all the strength of her passionate heart, she had to face the thought of leaving him behind when she went back to join Richmond.

"I can't take him again," she told Theodocia. "You know, Doxie, it was my fault he nearly died. I'd always been very careful, but the doctor said no care would keep a child healthy when he was dragged about the country as David has been. I never thought of it like that. If he had died—oh, Doxie."

"You never thought of anyone but that other one," Theodocia said sourly.

Jael engaged a young and trained nurse to look after David.

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She told David that one day she would have to go back to look after Richmond.

He tugged thoughtfully at a daisy root, and said—"Don't go."

"I must go," Jael said unsteadily.

He sat quite still for some minutes and then flung his arms round her, pressing his soft cheek into her neck. "I don't feel very happy," he said.

Jael struggled with her tears. "Oh, darling little love," she said. "I don't want to go. I'll come back as soon as I can."

They did not tell David when she was going, but he knew, when the young nurse arrived, that he was to be handed over to her at once. He hid the knowledge in his baby thoughts and followed Jael round the house all that day.

When he slept Jael and Theodocia stood looking down at him in his cot. Jael's boxes were packed and a car ordered for the morning train. She would not cry before Theodocia, but a hard knot had formed in her throat. She held on to the rail of the cot.

"It goes to my heart," Theodocia said slowly, "to hand over poor little David to that tetchy uncomfortable wench."

David opened his eyes and repeated sleepily—"Poor li'l David."

Jael cried herself to sleep, and for the hundredth time wondered wretchedly if she did right to go to Richmond. "He needs me," she said, "surely he needs me." But David needed her too. Jael stifled her sobs in her pillow.

She had resolved not to say good-bye to David, and in the morning she waited outside his bedroom door while the young nurse went in. Her cold hands were locked together and she pressed her lips tightly, thinking how that girl would scorn her if she rushed in and cried—"David, oh David, I can't go."

In the glass she saw David sit up in his cot and look at

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the newcomer. He sat very straight, and when she stood by him, he said anxiously—"It's—it's a nice morning."

Poor, brave, nervous little voice—David's voice propitiating the unknown. Jael heard it in her ears as the car drove her to the station and heard it all the way in the train. Poor Jael. Richmond saw her heavy eyes and took her tenderly in his arms. She clung to him.

"You do want me, don't you?" she said.

"More than anything on earth," he assured her. . . .

Theodocia had written that David was not as he ought to be. "It's not," she wrote, "that the maid does less than her duty. The maid's a good enough maid. And I never knew one so young as this to fret. But he does, and that's all there is to it."

Jael showed the letter to Richmond. He read it through and handed it back without comment. Jael waited until she could wait no longer. "Richmond," she said imploringly.

He looked at her with unkind eyes. "I suppose you want to rush home."

"I don't want to go," she said unhappily. "But—David's fretting. Oh, Richmond, you know I don't want to go."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I know that it's dull here."

Jael hid her hurt. She looked at the lines round his hard young mouth, and her heart ached to comfort him. He was unhappy. If he were not, he would not hurt her so.

"It's not dull for me to be where you are," she told him.

"But you'll go to David all the same, at the first word from a silly old woman."

"I must go," she repeated. "I'll come back—if I can."

He walked across the room. "If you can." He laughed. "So you put David first?" said he.

Jael steadied her voice. "It's just," she said, "it's just because David's second, and always will be second, that I must go to him now."

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Richmond turned and saw her face, and flung himself across the room. "Oh, Blossoms," he mourned, "what a fool I am. I can't think why I behave so badly to you. Some devil wakes in me, and I want to hurt you." He rocked her in his arms. "You'll hate me soon. If you don't get away from me, you'll surely come to hate me."

"I won't go," she said, and kissed him softly.

"Yes, you will," he said. "I want you to go. You shall go to your little boy, dearest and sweetest of mothers. Only—don't forget your other little boy, cruel as he is to you. Come back to him, Blossoms. He'll need you, you know."

Jael travelled North the next day. Theodocia met her on the threshold. "I didn't tell un you were coming," she said. "I was afraid to, for fear 'ee didn't come, after all."

Jael tore her arms out of her coat. "Where is he?"

Theodocia nodded at the sitting-room door. Jael pushed it softly open. David sat on the floor, adding brick to brick in a tottering tower. It fell. "Stupid thing," he murmured, and began listlessly to gather up the bricks.

He looked up and saw her. Without a word he got to his feet and came slowly across the room. Even when she took him up and held his small warm body close to hers, he said nothing, only clung to her, and after a while broke into a fit of weeping.

He was in her room watching her when she woke in the morning. She took him into bed and he cuddled down with a flickering smile. "You went in the night last time," he said gravely. "I'll watch so that you can't go like that again. I'll stay awake all night and listen."

"You needn't do that," Jael said. "I won't leave you again."

Her mind made up, she had a swift revulsion of feeling and longed for Richmond. A queer dread oppressed her. She wrote to him—a long letter, and for Jael, strangely revealing.

"David has fretted himself thin, Richmond, and I can't leave

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him again for so long You'd know if you were here and could see him. I shall just have to stay with him. You see, after all, he's only a baby.

"I've said it abruptly to you because I am sick at heart to say it at all. I think that you need me now more than you did before, and it is an agony to me that I am perhaps failing you. Last night I stood looking out across the valley. I could see the trees of Weetwood and I remembered how kind you were there to me. I remembered the narrow path that we two walked along, and the wind in the trees above us and the sound of waters falling. I was eighteen again, 'a very young girl' in her boy lover's arms. And saw your dear face strange and pale in the moonlight, and your eyes so grave and kind for me. You cannot know how I adore the outline of your face: it is so narrow and fine, and has such beloved hollows at your temples.

"Dear, if you miss me, think that I miss you as much. Here in the quiet, with all things shut away, the stillness is alive with memories. I can almost hear your voice.

"The wind blows sweetly over the moor, Richmond, and through our Enchanted Wood. I call it that to myself—do not laugh at me. But no, I don't mind if you laugh.

"I think sometimes it would be better if I cared less for bodily things—I mean, the touch and sight and sound of things. Theodocia says that the Devil has five gates into us—our senses. If I were more spiritual I would mind this separation less. But indeed, I mind it most because I am afraid you will be lonely. And being married to you has taught me also that there is no bodily thing that has not a soul of beauty in it. And that there is nothing you could ask me to do for you that I would not do and find it joy. Dear love, dear husband, dear hurt child Richmond, I wish for you all happy things and for you to come soon."

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And after a while, leaning her head on her hand, she added, "If you say—'I cannot live here alone'—then I'll come to you at once and care for nothing else."

She sent her letter and waited with nervous impatience for the reply. From a window of Jude's room she could see a bend in the road from the village, and every day at the hour the postman would come—if he came—she stood there. As the days passed she realized how much, unconsciously, she had staked on that letter, into which she had put all the ardour of her longing for Richmond's actual presence, and the dreams of her mind that forgot nothing, no word or touch, of her initiation into romantic love, and the shy diffident searching of her passionate young heart for some word or sign that should guide her now in making what she felt to be a momentous decision.

She imagined causes for Richmond's delay in answering, but when two weeks passed in silence she forbade herself to watch the road. As the hour when the post might come drew near she grew restless and caught herself listening, and when it had long gone, she threw aside the dull ache of disappointment. Once she thought that the man might have forgotten it and rode into the village to ask at the office. And once he came, and the letter was not from Richmond.

She waited two months and wrote again, a short letter whose few lines concealed the sharpness of her longing.

Richmond wrote, and his letter was short and said nothing at all to her heart, so that she let the single sheet of paper flutter to the ground and covered her face with her hands.

Weeks slipped into months. Peace was signed and still Richmond was not demobilized. He did not come home at all on leave, and Jael discovered in herself a new pride that would not ask the reason. She wished that he would write to her more often, and made plans for their life when at last he would be free, and wrote her letters of shy desire and half-articulate pain;

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gave David his first riding lesson, and watched him grow into his seventh laughing year.

She was a serene and adoring mother, and David's joyous playmate. He, at seven, was tall and slim, arrow-straight and long in the back, with the delicate brilliant colouring of the fair-haired Trudes, fine nervous hands, narrow rounded chin, and wide-browed serenity. His smile was the puckish elfin smile of the Trudes, but he had inherited Richmond's clear deliberation of speech and Richmond's long patience, that broke, when it did break, with such devastating thoroughness.

He sat on a broken coping in the walled garden and drew dreadful sounds from an old violin that Jael had bought from a pedlar for him. In his head David heard the most delicate air in the world—faery music compounded of all the sounds he liked best, the sound of birds twittering in the early morning, water falling in a tiny stream, the clear-ringing tip tap of water dropping slowly from the gutter over his window, the swish of Theodocia's whisk as she beat eggs into a yellow froth, the thin piercing crackle of a wood fire, the roar of trees at dusk, and the whispering rustle of the long grass in the orchard—first, it whispered softly, softly, then came a little rush and a scurrying of unseen feet, and then softly, softly, the whispering began again.

The bow scraped and the strings screamed and whimpered. David's face turned very red. He flung the fiddle to the ground and stamped on it with his feet.

Jael, coming just in time to see the crushed wreckage thrown furiously away, said—"Oh, David, your fiddle! It cost me three shillings."

David's eyes were wild and bright, and the colour burned in his cheeks.

"It was a silly thing," he said loudly.

"You liked it yesterday," Jael murmured.

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"It didn't *play*," David insisted. "It wouldn't play."

"You didn't understand how to play it," Jael retorted.

David flung out a frantic arm. "I know all the music," he stormed. "All there is. The spitevul thing wouldn't listen to me."

Choking with rage and disappointment he rushed away.

Jael stood still, looking at Janet Trude's almond tree with bright puzzled eyes, very slender and childish-seeming, smiling a little, dreaming and disquieted.

Theodocia's voice, raised in angry horror, greeted her as she entered the hall, and Theodocia, followed by a David coated thickly with mud, came into the kitchen from the kitchen garden. The old woman was very angry. She filled a tub with warm water, and stripping David of his sodden clothes thumped him into it and scrubbed his draggled hair. Silent tears ran down David's cheeks and he looked piteously at Jael. Jael ran across the kitchen, crying—"What is it, little love?"

Theodocia wrung her sponge viciously. "Little love has overdone his mischief," she croaked. "He'm a praper devil. I reckon he'm bewitched. I saw en riding across the yard on the li'l pony, and I called to en to stop. 'Du'ee stop now,' I telled en, and ah laughed fit to kill and rode on, standing in's stirrups and bellowing like the bull of Bashan. He rides me over the hens and kills me two pullets, as sweet burds as ever hatched out'n a shell, and breaks me four legs and fair frightens the life out'n the new Sussex cock that stood there on one leg like a thing demented." Theodocia stopped for breath. "Spitevul toad," she said, and lifting David out, rolled him in the bath sheet.

Jael knelt down beside the child and began to rub him dry. "Where did the mud come from?" she said quietly.

"He rode through t'pond and pitched off," Theodocia retorted briefly.

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Jael said nothing, knowing well how deep and poignant was Theodocia's grief over a dead bird: she coddled and petted her hens as she never petted a child in all her long life.

"David darling, don't cry," she said softly.

But David continued to cry silently, with lips compressed and wide eyes. Jael made a small feeble joke, and he said mournfully—"It did not play, my dear." Jael wiped away the tears that continued to flow in silence, and sought for his little bright blue sleeping suit.

When he was lying in bed they did not cease until Jael lay down beside him and warmed him in her arms. He pressed kisses on her face and in the soft cubby hole between her neck and shoulder, and said—"I don't feel very happy about the violin. Do you know why I broke it? I was very angry indeed with it, and Mr. Temptation whispered in my ear—'Break it, break it.'"

Jael knew all about Mr. Temptation, a mysterious creature of David's imagination and capable of every sin that David's fertile wit suggested to him. She did not feel able to cope with the sinister creature now.

"Never mind," she said hastily.

"I'm sorry I broke it. I wish I had three shillings for you. When I have money I'll give you it all to buy yourself nice things. I promise you I will."

Jael said gravely—"You would have to buy Theodocia some new chicks first, David."

David hid his face in the pillow. "I didn't want to kill the darling chicks," he said. His grief-stricken voice was proof enough. Jael could not delay forgiveness any longer. She tucked him up and went away to make bread-and-milk and to soothe the distraught Theodocia.

David sat up in bed and held the fine china porringer in both his hands. "Dear bowl," he carolled, "dear milk, dear Jael."

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His eyes sparkled with a faery joy, and Jael thought she had never seen anything so radiant and so fair.

"David," she said, "tell me why you rode over the chicks."

He looked at her with mischief like a soft flame glowing in his cheeks. "I was the cavalry," he said, "and I came into the market-place and saw it full of people and carts and stalls, and I shouted for them to make way for me and my horses, but they were wicked and would not move." He tossed his fair head, and dug his heels into the bed. His voice rose in unearthly glee. "So," he said, "I rode the beggars down."

"Gentlemen," said Jael, "do not ride people down."

"But these were all mad people who eat babies," David retorted.

"You are an unprincipled child," Jael murmured. She took the empty porringer away. "I wish there'd been two of you, 'dorable David," she said. "Then you could have played with each other." David looked up to ask why there were not two. Jael sighed again.

"There just weren't."

David saw the end of things in sight. He tried to juggle with fate by entangling Jael in an argument. "Horses," he said reflectively, "are more joyful than motor-cars, I think."

Jael shook her head. She smiled adorably. "No use," she said firmly. "You must sleep now, David."

A few minutes later he was fast asleep, as peacefully as if he had never known what it was to lead a charge through insubordinate multitudes. His long curving lashes shadowed the dazzling bloom of his cheeks.

Jael wished Richmond were there to see how like a flower his open hand lay on the blanket. Then she remembered how naughty David had been, and sighed.

She went downstairs to find Jude.

Jude was leaning on the broad window-sill of Jael's sitting-

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room. The level rays of the winter sun set his hair on fire. The intense blue of his eyes burned and flashed with light. He was a slim nineteen and restless as a cat, a flame in a frail body. For all his useless leg he rode with the easy seat of the backwoods. A mare that the Bellber grooms could not hold quieted down as soon as he got her between his knees. He rode anything, provided it were wild enough. Yet he was out of place in that small hard-riding hard-living community, for he had a tongue like a flail and a knife-edge of mockery that could flick a none too sensitive squire on the raw, when his clumsy jests were aimed at Jude.

His face had a strange grave sweetness, except when the narrow mouth took on a wry twisted curve as if the taste in his mouth were bitter, as indeed it was whenever he thought upon his crippled leg. The boy had never peace of soul. He was tormented by a devil of hate and resentment that at times so intolerably pricked and goaded him that he had to ride until he was ready to swoon with fatigue before he dare venture his face before Jael.

His love for Jael savoured of idolatry. He emptied into it all the dreamy ardour of his love of beauty and all the tenderness that should have been the wellspring of his own life. He was ready to love and serve Richmond because Jael loved him, but Richmond showed the boy an indifferent kindliness that checked Jude's shy advances almost before they were made. Jude ventured no more: he was shy and diffident in Richmond's presence, and even Jael did not see the consuming loneliness in Jude's eyes when she and Richmond had been sometimes for weeks absorbed in Richmond's work, and oblivious to everything else in the world.

He turned round as Jael came towards him, and smiled his rare sweet smile.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

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Jude answered briefly—"Riding," and suddenly out of the black conviction of uselessness that would not let him rest, he began a bitter low-voiced speech.

"What else would I be doing?" he said. "There's nothing else I'm fit for. I'm ashamed to be crawling about the earth these days when the salt of it's underground. Think of it, Jael. I've the best kind of hand on a horse: I can shoot *anything*. I can follow a trail like—like a bushman, and I'm useless, dragging about the earth like a crippled dog." His voice dropped until it was almost inaudible. "Do you know what I did a year ago, Jael? I rode over to the town and saw the officer at the recruiting station and told him what I could do. I all but went down on my knees to him to give me some work a man could do." He stopped, and Jael saw that his face was covered with a burning flush.

"What did he say?" she asked softly.

Jude laughed. "Oh, just what might have been expected. Called me 'Good lad' and told me, kindly to be sure, to go home and keep cheerful." Jael watched his tense angry hands. "Good lad," he repeated softly, "I could have choked him to death."

Jael said nothing and his voice rose a little. "Think of all the things there are to do in the world. John Bellber's in Africa. Before the war he was the only white man in a province of hundreds of miles. Stuck in a swamp and rotten with fever, and holding out there for five years because it was his job. And old Nick Yeoman's son that went to India and wrote those four perfect little poems *The Times* printed when he'd died holding a hill fort with ten men against ten hundred. They found them in his notebook when they found his body, and a note he'd written three days before the end. I know it by heart. It's better than the poems. 'This is quite hopeless. I've reckoned up how long the relief will be coming and I suppose they

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will be here about four days after the end. I've considered whether it wouldn't be better to rush out and get it over at once, but I believe it is our job to hold out to the last possible minute. Don't cry over us, my dear. It's a splendid way to die, like a fire on a mountain top that the rain has quenched. But please God we're only one tiny flame, and there's that behind us in England to fire the world.'" Jude's voice faltered. "He couldn't spell 'relief.' He spelt it twice and left it 'releif.' Oh, Jael, a man's life. And he died and I'm alive, like any rotten coward that skulks at home when there's a hard job to do in the world."

Jael said in her clear ringing voice. "I think your sort of courage is the hardest kind in the world to have, because you're not on fire with any ideal or helped by having comrades round you, and there's nothing you can do to quiet your nerves. But I've never known you give in or ask for pity or shrink from the hard thing you've had to do."

Jude smiled down at her. "And what's that, my dear?" he said.

"To keep fit and sweet when you've had a devil's reason to grow soft and ugly."

"Sweet?" Jude mocked.

Jael looked at him with quiet eyes. "You're sweet to me, and to David, and to Theodocia. You make Trudesthorp a dear place for us." She paused. "Do you remember when you went out riding for the first time after your leg was hurt. I wanted to help you on the pony, but you got up alone and rode off. And I knew you were afraid. But you said never a word and I watched you every day. You rode for a month with the fear of death in you. And one day you came back late, tired to death. I ran out, and when I looked at you I saw that you'd won. You weren't afraid any more."

Jude laughed gaily. "It went quite suddenly," he said.

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"I just found one day that I was quit of it. But oh wisest and most wonderful of sisters, what mercy taught you to hold your tongue about it?"

"What taught us anything about each other?" Jael said.

They were silent. A sky like old ivory stretched above the moor, hung across with drifting clouds. The room was dark. Jude walked over to the fire and parted the smouldering logs so that they gave up the flame at their heart. Then he lit candles and pushed Jael's chair into the light. "Now read to me," he said.

So Jael found a book and read. *"Now they began to go down the hill into the valley of Humiliation. It was a steep hill and the way was slippery. . . .*

"Some also have wished that the next way to their Father's house were here, that they might be troubled no more with either hills or mountains to go over; but the way is the way and there is an end.

"Now as they were going along and talking, they espied a boy feeding his father's sheep. . . ."

When Jael went to her room that night she lingered a long while looking out into the star-held night. She had a curious sharpened sense of loss, as if Richmond had withdrawn himself to an infinite distance. It was long since he had written: his silence was a wall against which she beat impotent hands. She thought of him to-night with a strange nervous desire to go to him. She began to talk softly, with little frustrate gestures. "Dear Richmond," she said, "if you were not so silent, if you would tell me what I have done that you have put me out of your heart. There isn't anything I wouldn't do to get back. Do you want me, Richmond? Oh, Richmond, Richmond, I can't bear it, I can't bear it."

She began to talk quickly in an urgent whisper. "I must go to him. I'll write in the morning and say—Dear, I can't

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live here without you. I'll come down." Her voice shook. "Oh, I can't," she cried softly. "I can't. If he wanted me he'd ask me to come. He doesn't want me. He doesn't want me."

She put her arm across her eyes. "I won't cry again," she said, but she *was* crying, with a rush of tears that blinded and choked her, and soft shuddering cries. She huddled on the floor, exhausted and beaten. Her crying ceased, save for one long-drawn sigh that lifted the heavy hair fallen across her face. Jael slept, with drooping head, and slender body sunken and crushed.

She dreamed.

"Oh, my little sweet, what have you done to your dear face? You're all pale. You've been crying for me. . . . Come right into me and let me get you warm. Oh, you foolish little Jael. Did you mind so? Did you mind so, little love?"

She woke and shivered, and lifted her head. An exceeding bitter cry broke from her. She stood up, swayed a little because she was so stiffly cold, and with groping outstretched hands made her way across the room.

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CHAPTER III

RICHMOND was coming home. He wrote to tell Jael the day he would be with her, and then wired that he would be kept another week. Jael was unreasonably grieved for the delay.

The day he was coming she could not rest, but flitted about the house, played with David and made so many blunders that he went off by himself, bothered Theodocia, interrupted Jude in his reading, and was found by Theodocia dreamily whipping cream without looking at the bowl in her hand. Theodocia took it from her. "My dear life," the old woman said unkindly, "du'ee look at this butter. Heaven help 'ee for a love-sick maid."

But Jael laughed, and on an impulse wandered out of the house and along the field path to the village, until she reached the place where she had stood with Jude, hesitating and half-afraid, on her marriage day. She smiled and sighed for the happy girl, and turned back to Trudesthorp.

As she went, she noticed where across the beck, in the loam below the trees, a meek company of snowdrops braved the sharp wind. She felt a sudden thrill of joy and her heart lightened of its lingering burden. They were the fairest frailest children of the rude earth. They were like high sweet flutes preluding the ecstatic music of the spring. She looked at them with a half-sorrowful affection, and a glowing happiness filled her. She waved her hand to them and began to run along the upward path, the wind in her face and her mouth curved in a joyous smile.

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Breathless, with cheeks stung to radiance, and wide lustrous eyes, she reached Trudesthorp. She ran upstairs and shut the door of her room behind her. She was afraid of the joy that burned in her. She wanted to hide it from those others: she drew it close round her and almost held her breath lest it should vanish suddenly.

She did not think now of that girl who went in her shy pride through hawthorn-paths to marry Richmond. She was that girl, waiting for her lover. She stood with hands crossed on her breast and lifted laughing face. The laughter died in the brave curves of her mouth and in her wide eyes, grave now and dreaming. Almost she felt Richmond's kiss on her mouth: she saw his face, grave and tender in the soft light. Warmth of his love, joy of his desire, were round her. She was touched and held, and the lonely years were as if they had not been.

She caught her breath on that exultant ecstasy, and then knelt impulsively by her bed and said—"Oh, my dear, thank You for letting Richmond come back. It is wonderfully good of You. And take care of all the poor women whose men will never come. And help me to be good and worthy of Your great gift to me."

A door opening and shutting loudly, Jude's voice on the stairs, David's bubble of laughter. She opened her door and ran across the landing, her heart beating madly. She stood at the head of the stairs and said softly—"Richmond." A strange weakness seized on her limbs. She was trembling violently, and she held tightly to the railing as she went.

Richmond looked up. He saw her coming to him down the wide stairs. As always, when he saw her again after long absence, her beauty came to him with the poignant sharpness of a revelation. He had forgotten the slender rounded grace of her young body, and the brave poise of her small head. He had forgotten that her eyes were the most amazing in the world, and

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shadowed so by their heavy lashes. He had forgotten the audacious charm of her mouth and her narrow feet and all the girl's sweetness of her.

He ran up the stairs and reached her on the small half-landing. She swayed to his arms and he caught her and held her. He said—"Jael," and "Dear love," and then "Jael" again, and tried to say—"I've come home," but the foolish words would not be said and he stammered her name again. The beating of his heart was suffocating him. He could not speak to her. She felt the desperate tension of his arms and tried to comfort him with a murmur of soft words and faint kisses laid lightly on his lips. He but held her the closer and said, "Jael, Jael," in a strange smothered voice. He knew it was not her beauty that was hurting him like a sword-thrust in his heart, but the stirring of an old dream and the clutch of her fingers in his heart strings. She was calling him by an old name, she was thrusting her hands into the deep secret places where his soul had fled to hide its sore wound. Ah, they hurt, they hurt, her hands. He groaned—"Your dear hands," and kissed them, pressing their cool palms to his hot face.

Jael looked at him with all her love, grave and unashamed, shining through her eyes, and said—"Everything's all right now you're home."

She watched him go on upstairs, stumbling once as if he hardly saw, and then she ran down and hugged David and said to Jude—"Dear Jude," and to Theodocia—"Why did he come so soon? There'll be no turf cakes ready." She flitted along to the kitchen and began to get ready the tea so long prepared for. "I won't make any more mistakes, Doxie," she said. "You can safely give me the cream to whip, or—or anything."

They had tea, and Richmond said abruptly—"I'll go and look round the studio."

"Shall I come?" Jael asked shyly.

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He said—"No," without looking at her, and went.

Hours passed, and he did not come. Once Jael went as far as the door of the barn, and there, halted by that swift "No," hesitated and went back. She answered Jude's "Goodnight," and when he had gone, moved restlessly about the room. It was a nice room, she thought, with the fire in the huge stone fireplace and the candlelight kind to shabby brocade and faded silk. Why did not Richmond come and share it with her?

She wandered upstairs. The clothes out of his kit-bag were strewn about his room. A corded box stood in the middle of the floor. She stood beside the table, touching his scattered things with caressing fingers. She folded clothes and laid them away and fingered idly the cord of the box. Then walked slowly across the landing to her own room.

She fell asleep. Once, waking, she thought unhappily that it must be very late, or very early in the morning. She choked back a rush of tears and lay for a long time staring into the darkness. Then, for she was tired, fell asleep again.

She was up early, and as she went downstairs saw that Richmond's door was set ajar. She hesitated, walked on, and then, giving way to a swift impulse, turned back and went softly into his room. He was asleep, with arms flung out in an attitude of utter weariness. She stood beside him, looking at him with a queer sense of humiliation, and smiled in fleeting mockery of herself. Her eyes betrayed her: they were like those of a child whose child's pride has been wantonly hurt. She would have died rather than show Richmond her humbled pride.

Then she thought—"Oh how tired you are," and stooping, laid the gentlest of kisses on his hair and slipped away, afraid to disturb him.

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CHAPTER IV

RICHMOND looked at his father with something like dismay. John Drew sat with folded arms and a faintly mocking smile on his narrow face.

"Do you mean," Richmond said, "that there isn't any more work to do at all? Can't we start again?"

The elder man said carelessly—"There's nothing to start on. No one has bought garden statuary or anything else of the kind for years. Your uncle is hard put to it to pull through. He wants nothing sending from here and will have no orders to give. The thing's smashed, I tell you. It may recover. It may not." He waved a negligent hand. "You might make tombstones. Hope, with drooping wings, don't you know, brooding on decay."

Richmond stammered. "Don't you care at all?"

His father smiled, again that faint mocking twitch of his thin lips. "Why should I care? I'm old enough to be glad to rest. As for you—how old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"A boy, a mere boy. And strong as an ox."

Richmond frowned. He was frankly bewildered by this reverse, and had no plans to meet it. He said abruptly—"What did you think I could do?"

John Drew lifted his one eyebrow: the other was missing, which gave him a grotesque air. "What you like." He added, with an abrupt change of tone, "I'll give you five hundred. It's all there is. You must make it do until you've arranged things."

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"Five hundred?" Richmond repeated absently.

His father leaned forward, with an odd watchful eagerness. "Say six. Seven. Seven hundred, not a pound more. God knows how I'll manage that. It's hard for a man to face want in his age."

Richmond said slowly, "I hadn't asked you for any at all." His father's manner puzzled him.

John Drew wrung his hands: his nonchalant calm had dropped from him like a mask, revealing a twitching haggard face. "Take seven," he implored, and his voice cracked. "Don't ask me for more. I haven't got it."

Richmond had a swift conviction that the man was lying. Then his own suspicions revolted him. He wanted to rush out, anywhere, to get away from this room, which oppressed him horribly. He thought it must be hot, and flung open a window.

The effect on his father was amazing. John Drew waved frantic arms. "Shut it," he croaked, "shut it quickly. Don't you know how dear coal is, that you must let the cold of winter in on me! Here, take your money. Go home and waste your own coal."

He rushed to his desk and began writing a cheque: he thrust it, all unblotted, into Richmond's hands and urged him towards the door.

"The man's crazed," Richmond thought, and then, looking at him, could not think that it was madness gleamed in the sunken eyes.

"I'll take the money," he said slowly, "and be thankful for it." He added—"After all, I haven't cost you much until this."

His father's manner changed with the same startling swiftness when Richmond had folded the cheque and put it in his pocket. He became again the cool indifferent observer. He smiled courteously.

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"I am sure you will come through all right," he murmured. "You can repay me when you are on your feet."

Richmond hurried home to tell Jael that they had seven hundred pounds between them and beggary.

"What a lot of money," Jael said childishly. Richmond frowned, and she sat down to think over the affair. She came of a hard stock and had an immense reserve of practical sense. Moreover, seven hundred pounds did seem to her a sum to conjure with. She wondered if Richmond knew on what a tiny sum she and Theodocia kept the household going.

She said slowly—"The first thing is that you must get on with your work."

"Work," repeated Richmond, and let his hands fall on the table in front of him.

Jael nodded. "It's the most important thing. Therefore you must have the whole of the money to buy the things you want. If I were you, I'd go to Leeds and see your uncle. He might be able to give you orders that your father would think too small to bother with. At the least, he could advise you. Then we'll think again."

She considered a little and added—"It's a pity we live so far from people. People who might give you commissions," she finished vaguely.

Richmond smiled a little wryly, and she leaned forward. "Would you like to go and live in London or Paris—just you, I mean? We could manage here." She waited, with an odd tightening of her throat, for his reply.

"No," Richmond said violently. "No."

"Oh," cried Jael, "I'm so glad. I thought——" She faltered.

Richmond said sombrely, "You thought I'd go and leave you here again. You have a great respect for me, haven't you, my wife?"

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Jael stooped to kiss his nervous hand. "I didn't think of it like that," she said gently. "I was trying to think of the best thing for you."

He said—"Oh Jael," in a queer voice. She got up and seated herself on his knee, where she could stroke his face and touch his hair with her soft fingers.

"You know," she said, "Theodocia and I have managed wonderfully all this time that you were away and could not send me any money." She did not see the crimson flush that swept over his face because her cheek was resting on his hair. "My father gives Theodocia a little more than he did and she gets a lot of money for her things now. And what difference in the expense will you make? Why, none at all." She laughed gaily. "And we shan't any of us want clothes for ages. Except David, and Elizabeth Hender helps me to make his."

"I can't live on you and Theodocia," Richmond said bitterly.

She sat up to look at him. "Sweet," she said, "if you knew what joy it was to plan for you."

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CHAPTER V

RICHMOND was not easy to live with these days. He was often moody and violently impatient, saying unkind things in a thin mocking voice, until Jael, in uncomprehending pain, tried blindly to hurt him because she was herself so hurt. She was John Trude's daughter, after all, and her tongue was a deadly enough weapon. She passed from bitter silence to bitter speech, saying things that remained in Richmond's memory for weeks, pricks that festered.

There were times when Richmond thought of her as an enemy. Her childish loveliness, which he had so desired and taken, seemed to hide an alien spirit that hated and mocked him. He pursued the alien thing in her, and Jael fled before him, smiling her ironic elfin smile and hiding her tears. Afterwards she came to him with wild remorseful words, and sometimes with a passionate weeping. She clung to him, and he held her quietly and caressed her. He had no words for her self-reproaches, but once, when exhausted and silent she lay in his arms, he said gently and almost fearfully, "I think we do love each other, don't we, Jael?" She said—"Yes, oh yes," and lifted her cold lips to his in swift response.

There were golden days and happy days, when Jael had her fill of joyous life, when Richmond rode with her and watched her delicate swaying body, and teased her with the old audacious tenderness. He was always happy on a horse and rode as he lived, with a vivid wilful grace. Jael hid her passionate

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delight in him; it danced in her eyes and sang in her soft happy voice.

During these weeks he made one study of her, which was afterwards that curious wistful *Mary,* half aware of the cause she has for grief, slim and a little haughty, like a thoughtful boy, with ardent innocent eyes and a yielding childish lassitude in the curves of her body. But for the most part he worked alone and did not like Jael to come into his studio. If she came he walked up and down, talking, restless and disturbed.

Once he showed her a rough study of Paul. Jael looked at it for a long time and said at last—"Did you mean to show him suffering?"

"No," he said.

Jael looked again at the half-closed eyes of the young face and the throat straining backwards. "But there is suffering in it," she ventured.

"Do you think I can't see it?" Richmond said softly and bitterly. "And I meant to show you how brave and gay he was—Paul laughing at death. It changed under my hands, I tell you. Jael——" His voice rose suddenly. "Jael, the world's too beastly. I can't make gay lovely things. . . ."

One day Richmond had a visitor. A small bright-eyed Jew, with fine nervous features and a long mobile mouth. He had seen *The Lover,* which was still in a small London gallery whose owner had no objection to keeping it there as a permanent part of the decoration. Richmond received him with the utmost discourtesy. Jael, trying to soften his incredible brusqueness, met the cold fury of his eyes and stood aside in silence while the dealer persisted quietly in his self-imposed mission. He saw the plaster cast of *The Lover,* and a copy in lead of Richmond's adorable laughing *Faun,* and a model of Jael's head, one of the few that had survived the ordeal of

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casting in plaster, and a large and unusually finished cartoon that Jael unearthed for him of the Paolo and Francesca group. He said suavely—"You are your own moulder? You must have lost a lot of things."

Jael laughed and Richmond glared.

The Jew glanced sharply at him and said—"I understand from Meyrick that you refused two offers for *The Lover.*"

"I did," Richmond said shortly.

"I wonder," the other man said courteously, "if you'd tell me why."

"I see no reason why I should tell you a damned thing," Richmond retorted savagely.

The man raised his fine brows. "So?" he said quietly. "Perhaps the offers were not—adequate."

"I didn't choose to sell the thing," Richmond told him, and added viciously—"We haven't all the soul of a Jew."

"Richmond," Jael breathed involuntarily.

The dealer smiled and lifted his dark, melancholy eyes to Richmond's hot ones. "A Jew's soul is a queer thing," he said softly. "But it never fails to worship beauty when it finds it. Otherwise—should I be here?" He spread out his thin hands.

His eyes, peering round the studio, rested on the work that Richmond had been doing that day. Out of the shapeless clay emerged the half of a man's body. The head was lifted, and the closed eyes lent no serenity to the tortured face. The muscles of the back and the broad chest were swollen and strained in an agony of effort.

He walked across the studio to look at it more closely, noting how to the unfinished study the modelling lent a fierce energy and a soul that strove with the scarified flesh. He said softly—"This is what you do—now?"

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For a while after he had gone, Richmond stood rooted, his hands in his pockets and his eyes half closed. Suddenly they were blazing open. He said to Jael—"Get out of my way, Jael," and snatching up a wooden mallet, dealt a smashing blow at the cast of *The Lover*. Blow followed blow, drowning the sound of Jael's cry, and then he turned to the cast of her head.

Jael cried out in an agonized voice. "Oh, Richmond, no more, no more. They—Richmond—I sat for them. They're half mine. Richmond."

She seemed to shrink under his eyes, become limp and small and colourless. He dropped the mallet and went to her. "All right," he said painfully. "I—I've stopped." He paused, and said—"Hadn't you better go?"

She went, swaying a little, and stumbling once.

He made no move to help or follow her, but when she had gone stood with his head flung back like that of the straining, tortured figure he had just modelled. Rigid, with closed eyes, he stood. He drew a difficult breath and relaxed. He looked at the fragments of *The Lover*.

"It was mine," he said harshly. "I sweated blood to make it. I had the right to smash it."

When the light failed and he went back to the house he found Jael sitting with listless hands. She opened her book when he came, but he saw that she made a poor pretence of reading. She went away to make their supper ready, and coming back hesitated near his chair. He knew that if he did but lift his eyes she would kneel beside him and seek comfort with voice and hands caressing him. His obstinacy tormented him, and his whole body ached to feel the warmth of her breast and see her eyes shine their soft radiance into his. He would have rested her in his arms and found rest himself. But he could

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not move. A strange lassitude, half resentment and half shame, pressed on his spirit. He sat still with his eyes on the flames of the fire and his mouth shut in a narrow line.

Later they quarrelled dreadfully.

Jael said—"Why were you so unkind to that poor man?"

He gave her an unfriendly glance. "Need you criticize my manners too?" he asked her.

Her voice trembled. "I wasn't doing that."

He said—"No. You were just using any stick to beat a dog with."

Jael laughed, a breathless, tremulous little laugh. "Don't be absurd," she said. Her eyes pleaded with him. He lashed himself into a rage. "You are still harping on the things I smashed. Why don't you say so outright? My God, I think a woman's mind is the crookedest thing on earth."

Jael winced. He saw the wounded thing look out of her eyes and saw it rally against him. She said slowly—"You have the right to destroy your own work. If destruction is all you can accomplish."

He towered over her, and she looked at him with narrow glinting eyes and anger in the twist of her mouth. "So that," he said, "is the reason for your kindness to my Jewish friend? You think I should have sold him things. I should have rubbed my hands and said—'What can I do for you? Let me make you some pretty things. My wife wants a new frock. My child wants a toy.'" He thrust out his chin so that his jaw made a cruel evil line.

There was a silence, while Jael folded her hands. Then she said deliberately—"Yes. I think about money. I've had to, you see."

She laughed, and the sound struck on him like a splash of icy water. He was suddenly cold and filled with a coldly

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crazy scorn. His hands fell and he smiled into her face. "I haven't supported you very well, I'm afraid," he said thinly. "I am really quite conscious of it, you know, and of having failed your expectations in the matter. Well, I'll do my best for you. You can have the seven hundred and I'll clear out. If I get work, I'll send you more. If I don't—well, at least you won't be bothered with an incompetent husband." He paused, and added with a queer, almost boyish bravado, "You've won, my dear. I wish you joy of your victory."

He turned on his heel and made for the door. Jael cried out. He turned and saw her white pitiful face and laughed at her.

He was gone. Jael put her hands to her head in an unconscious gesture. Her knees were shaking and she leaned against the wall. To her numbed brain the blood returned slowly, and then in a wildly beating flood. She said—"Oh, what shall I do?" and cried—"No, Richmond, no," and put out defensive hands. She sat down, and with her chin in her hand tried to think her way through the thing that had happened to her. But she could think of nothing save that Richmond had at last wearied of her blundering and her mean tongue. She grew dazed and witless with thinking, and at last wandered unhappily out into the walled garden.

The thin cold wind set her shivering, and from the depths of her despair came a memory of Anne. She lay down on the stone path with her face to the ground and her forehead pressed in her arm. Hour after hour she lay there, until shivering had passed into a racking agony of cramped limbs. She did not move. She was not thinking.

Richmond found her there in the darkness of the very early morning when he came back from his furious tramping of the moor. He picked her up and carried her upstairs, and half

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flung her into bed, taking off her clothes with unkindly hands. He rolled her in blankets and poured spoonfuls of hot milk and brandy between her lips. He was quite white with rage and the hands with which he rubbed her bruised and hurt her soft skin. He said—"You fool, you crazy fool."

Dumbly she suffered his anger and the physical pain of racked muscles, and in a vague groping fashion wondered why he was not kind to her when she was in such pain.

Suddenly he *was* kind. He stopped his cruel rubbing and caught her to him, all swathed in thick blankets, and covered her face with hot quick kisses. She freed her mouth to whisper—"Please come and rest," and he left her and came back ready for bed, and took her to him with a most blessed gentleness. He said—"Rest on me, little thing," and, "You'll be all right in the morning. I've seen men frozen up like that and they were right as rain the next day."

And—"Are you comfortable, little blossom?"

She was weak with fatigue and joy. "You were very angry, Richmond."

He rocked her in his arms. "This evening?" he asked.

She said—"No. Just now."

He held her closer and said with something like a groan—"I was furious with you for trying to harm yourself like that. As if I hated some other you for what you'd done to yourself."

A small sound, half sob and half laughter, answered him. "You're not angry now?"

He shook his head. She was lying relaxed against him: her slight body seemed melting into him. She stirred his pulses by her nearness and her weakness.

He knew that she was unutterably tired, but he whispered—"Are you very tired, my Jael?"

Rallying her forces for the effort she lifted her head through

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the waves of weariness that beat on her. "No," she said. "Not tired. Dear love, dear Richmond." His heart beat against her breast.

His mouth found hers.

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CHAPTER VI

JOHN TRUDE was ill and kept his bed. Jael went twice to see him. He lay under a mountain of blankets and complained of the cold. Martha kept monstrous fires burning day and night, and made hot possets which more often than not he flung at her head.

He blinked malignantly at Jael. His face had a horrid fascination for her. It was so wrinkled and pitted, with huge knots of veins, and yellow eyes sunk in vast overgrown hollows under brows like ragged eaves. She tore her eyes away from it and fixed them on the frieze, and saw there devils that blinked like John Trude and imps that stretched their mouths in just such mocking smiles as stretched his huge mouth now.

The second time she went he would not speak to her, except to tell her to keep away from the fire because she was too comfortable for her deserts, and when she went he told her not to come again and had Martha lock the door on his side of the great hall.

A few days later Martha ran out in the dusk to beg two ploughmen who were passing to call on the old Catholic priest in the village, and tell him that her master was speechless and dying. She thrust into their hands a sheet of paper on which—under a date several days before—he had written a wish to have the last rites of his church administered to him. . . .

Father Lawrence was very old. He had retired to his cottage when a younger priest took over the care of his sparse and

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widely scattered flock. He was a frail creature, with eyes still alive and luminous in a brown wrinkled face. All his life seemed concentrated in his eyes: they glowed with a steady flame that seemed lit from very far within. John Hender, who was his friend, said that he burned with God, for never a man lived that bore more shiningly the seal of God on his forehead. He had the eyes of a child, and yet they were not child's eyes, but wise with a man's wisdom and ineffably kind.

He read Trude's letter that said simply he feared death and prayed he might have the Sacrament for forgiveness of his great sins. He stood a short time in thought, and then put on his long cloak and made all ready and set off. Outside the vicarage he hesitated, and finally went in to show his friend Trude's message.

Hender spoke impulsively. "Let me ride to the town and fetch Father Bullen. It is a long bitter way to Trudesthorp. And I fear and distrust the man who wrote that letter."

"Why should you fear a dying man?" the father said mildly. "To fetch Father Bullen would take time—and an immortal soul is in the gravest danger. Besides"—he smiled—"Father Bullen is a young man and John Trude is old, very old, and I am old and we are both so near the grave that we shall be the nearer to each other. I must go, my friend."

Hender tapped the letter with a nervous finger. "It is not right," he said abruptly. "I feel that there is something not—not right—in the business. I'll walk up with you."

"You are good," the old man said simply. While Hender went to find hat and coat he spoke to Elizabeth Hender, who was sewing. *"She is not afraid of the snow for her household,"* he quoted, *"for all her household are clothed with scarlet."*

Mrs. Hender smiled into the gentle old face. "Not for my household," she said. "For old Ann," and held the garment up. "John says it is too pretty, but I think that when you are

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very old and very poor you must need beauty more than anyone else."

"Beauty," he repeated dreamily. "Yes. He made no ugly things in His six days' work."

John Hender returned and they set off. The wind blew chill and a frost-hag covered the road. It was eleven o'clock as they neared Trudesthorp: the old priest leaned heavily on his friend's arm, and looking at him anxiously, Hender saw that his face was ashen, in spite of the stinging wind. "It is too much for you," he said.

Father Lawrence shook his head. "Strength will be given," he answered. But he drew his breath painfully, and when they reached the shelter of the first wall of the grounds he leaned against it and closed his eyes. When he opened them he did indeed look better and had a better colour, and walked with more vigour down the moss-grown drive between the spectral trees.

They skirted the upper lawn and came round by the terrace to the door of the great hall. Hender saw that the priest was now able to stand alone, so he withdrew his arm and pushed at the heavy door, which yielded a little.

"The place is open," he said. "I'll not come in. If the garden door is unlocked I'll go round to the other wing and see if the young people are still up. But I'll not stay there. You'll find me waiting here when you come out, and if you want me——"

He paused. The father lifted his eyes and their strange penetrating glow burned into Hender's troubled ones. He felt suddenly very ignorant, though there was only a grave charity in the priest's calm regard. He murmured involuntarily—"I think you can deal with anything you find in there, father."

"*He* can," the priest said, and put his hand on the massive panels of the door.

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John Hender turned away and crossed the lawn to the door of the walled garden. A thin shaft of light, coming between the curtains of Jael's sitting-room, thrust into the darkness and touched into grotesque life the strange stone beast beside the path.

Jael listened to his story with a troubled face. "I knew nothing," she said. "It is a week since I saw him, and then I thought him better. He told me not to come again." Hender smiled grimly. "I was glad not to go," she confessed. "I should have made sure."

As Hender listened to her his vague uneasiness sharpened to foreboding. He left her and went back to the door of the great hall. There, sheltered in the arch of the doorway, he waited with what patience he could muster for the old priest's coming.

Father Lawrence stepped into the great hall and blessed the house and the dwellers in it. The place was dark and very cold, and only a pile of ashes smouldered on the hearth.

He had called there once, many years before, when Trude first came home from wandering on the face of the earth, and he had been dismissed in a manner that admitted of no return. But then he had seen it with the sunlight falling on greying walls and dimly lovely hangings and across the burnished staircase. He had not imagined this pit of lean hovering shadows, walled round with blackness. The walls receded as he groped towards the candles burning at the far side of the hall.

They stood, two of them, on a broad ancient stool. A crucifix lay beside them and a goblet of water, and a long quill. Father Lawrence viewed these preparations for his office with a faint surprise. He heard a tiny scrambling sound and, turning, saw Martha Sheldon advancing out of the surrounding darkness and stumbling as she came over the hem of her grotesque clothes.

She stood before him, jerking up and down like a marionette.

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"Don't do that," the priest said gently, and she straightened herself submissively.

"Where is your master?" he asked.

She pointed silently over his shoulder. He saw the dim bulk of a bed in the recess below the stairs and went towards it. It loomed out of the shadows, a vast cumbrous thing, heavily curtained and piled with strange coverings. In the middle a shapeless swollen hulk of blankets lay motionless.

The priest strained his eyes and could see nothing of the sick man's face.

"Bring a candle, my daughter," he said, and when she brought it, tripping and smiling, he asked her—"How long has he lain like this?"

The smile vanished from her face, leaving it oddly smooth and blank. "Days," she said, and waved a skinny arm. "Days and days and days and days——"

She did not seem able to stop, and the priest interrupted gently—"He has spoken?"

"No," said Martha loudly.

The thought crossed his mind that the man was dead. He lifted the candle and bent over the bed. Nothing was visible between nightcap and bed clothes, but peering intently, he discerned a faint movement. It might have been a trick of wavering light, and he stretched out his hand to remove the clothes from the hidden face. A violent feeling of repulsion swept over him. He summoned all his strength, but wave after wave of strange nausea followed, beating him back and back. He grew faint, and with an effort steadied himself.

His spirit knew that the man on the bed was an evil thing. For the first time in his life of service the old priest felt himself to be alone and without guidance. He asked silently for instruction. None came, and he felt a great fear.

The candle shook in his hand, and he handed it back to the

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old woman. She took it and placed it on the stool, leaving him in utter darkness beside the monstrous bed.

He drew back and found that strength flowed slowly through his limbs again. Martha was eyeing goblet and crucifix with her head on one side. She looked like some queer bird.

He asked her when Trude had written the letter she had sent, and she told him readily—"A se'night since."

"You kept it?" he said.

She fell to mouthing at him and would not speak.

The priest faced towards the bed. It seemed to him suddenly a pitiful thing that this old unhappy man should have lain a week waiting for the consolation he had sought. He walked back to the bed and Martha followed him. He said clearly—"My son." There came no sign or word.

"Father," the old woman told him timidly, "ah does not speak. I ha' fed him all day and still ah does not speak."

Pity burned in him for the dying man. "He has repented many times in his heart," thought he, "during the days of waiting." Now he thought he had his sign. He composed his soul for prayer.

A sound. A strange awful sound. Father Lawrence stood motionless, his very spirit suspended in a blinding flash of apprehension.

The curtains at the far side of the bed were shaking, moving, parting. Martha was laughing, doubled up like a troll, laughing, laughing, and beating her fists together.

A face was between the curtains, and it, too, laughed. A dim swollen mask of obscene mirth. Laughter tearing at the darkness. Laughter echoing from the leaning shadows. Terrible, inhuman sound. Laughter of the pit.

John Trude thrust like a monstrous puppet between the bed and the wall, one vast arm protruded to tear the piled-up clothes from the thing on the bed and reveal the body of his dog. "A

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jest," he gasped. "A rare jest, reverend father. You had a'most absolved poor Tess."

For one moment a just and burning wrath ran through the priest's veins like a fire. His face was stern and very still. Then it altered and he was as a man transfigured before them. He did not know what radiance came from him, but he was filled with a pity beside which that he had felt before was small and feeble.

"You poor soul," he cried, and then being warned of his new wisdom to go, he went, but as he reached the door his knees began to shake and he fumbled for the handle.

John Hender could not hear the faint sound of his hands, but he also was warned to open the door, and obeyed. He took the old man into the security of his arm and led him down the terrace.

They went in silence. John Hender dared not ask what had happened in the hall, and the priest had no thought of telling him. But after a while he said musingly—"There is in all of us a beast, my son, that is stronger even than the unbridled appetite a man may fall into. It lives below the lusts of the flesh and thrives, if it thrives, by a secret force. I think that by the grace of God we are most of us spared from its rousing. It is an old and dreadful mystery." His voice grew weak and Hender bent his head to listen. "The first sin, my son, was a sin of division—the will of man separating itself from the will of God. From that evil act was born pain, and in rebelling against pain man drew farther and farther from God. Yet the pain was the fruit of his own act. If he could but submit——"

He paused and added—"*Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*" A smile hovered round his mouth. "I am not so stout a servant as the brother of the

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blessed James," he murmured, "for I cannot read his words without grief."

When they reached the vicarage, Hender would have drawn him in. "You will stay with us to-night," he urged. "I do beg it."

The old priest shook his head. "You are kind," he said, "but I have an office to perform—a petition to make—that I can best make in my own house. Forgive me."

So Hender walked with him to his cottage. His old servant opened the door and looked gravely from Hender to her master.

"Ah, Susan," the old man said cheerfully, "I shall make old bones, I shall make very old bones."

He slipped from Hender's grasp and fell across the threshold. When Hender lifted the frail body he saw that the priest had gone to petition his Lord in person. He carried him in, with eyes blind with tears and heart hot with grief and pity.

An hour later, back in the vicarage, he thought his wife looked so weary that he would not tell her of it until the morning. She asked—"Did you see my Jael?"

He nodded.

"I doubt all is not well with the child," Elizabeth mused.

Her husband startled her by a vehement outcry—"Who," he cried, "who, in the name of all that's sane and decent, could live and thrive under the same roof as that vile old man? The very air must be poisoned."

From her bedroom window Jael saw the two men walk slowly across the terrace. She was very tired: she wanted Richmond to find out whether John Trude were really dying, and she was afraid to make the request.

Since her crazy venture in the walled garden, Richmond had become again the gay comrade of their first years of marriage.

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He seemed happy, and laughed in the boyish fashion Jael loved. He went riding with her and Jude, and played in the garden with a breathlessly happy David. But he never went near the studio or spoke of his work.

And Jael, shamed to the heart by the memory of her folly, tried in all gentle tender ways to efface the thought of it from his mind. She had not suffered, except that she was stiff and still languid: she was strong, for all her slender bones, very strong. She thought—"It is Richmond I have hurt by my selfish madness," and sought with humbly passionate eagerness to make it up to him.

She was afraid now to spoil the serenity of the last few days, and then she had a reckless impulse to put it to the test, and ran downstairs and said to Richmond—"Father Lawrence has gone. I wish you'd find out what is wrong."

Richmond looked up frowning. She said nervously—"You hate to go," and because she was nervous spoke coldly.

He laughed. "I'd rather be back in hospital." Her heart sank at his tone, and as she stood there looking at him with troubled eyes, he added—"You don't care whether he lives or dies. Why do you plague me with him now?"

"Very well," Jael said, and turned away, but when she came down with a coat over her nightgown, trying to slip out unseen, he lost his temper altogether, and ordering her back to bed promised angrily—"I'll go myself."

He went, but not for another hour, and he went resentfully. John Trude filled him with a repugnance so fierce that the casual sight of him through an open doorway made him sick and hot. As he went, he raged against Jael's stubborn caprice.

Martha had built up the fire. It roared and rushed up the chimney, and clouds of blue pungent smoke, driven down by a shifting wind, blew out into the hall. John Trude, naked as he was made, sprawled in the tawny glare on a heap of straw,

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with a litter of setter pups that rolled round and over him and fell off the vast slopes of him and tottered back to scramble up again.

A strange fascination conquered Richmond's nausea: he was impelled forward to gaze on the spectacle. Trude lay there like some fantastic monster carved in dulled bronze, waiting, grimed and bowed, through a fabulous procession of years, for the moment when Richmond should step into the night-fast hall and there discover him. His mouth smiled, and his eyes under vast heavy lids were bright with strange tears—a mask of tragedy that laughed with alien lips. His limbs sprawled out like the roots of a great tree, the colour of earth, twisted and knotted with age.

Richmond fought against the attraction that held him. He tore a quilt from the bed and flung it at Trude. "Put it round you," he ordered.

Trude obeyed, groaning and heaving with the effort: he flung the dogs off him so violently that they crept whimpering to a corner of the hearthstone and there hid.

In the folds of the quilt he had an almost humbled air. Richmond felt distaste conquering him again.

"I see you're not dying," he said grimly.

"Poor Tess died," Trude said sadly. "She died yesterday, the bonny thing. I ha' had her shrived."

Richmond neither knew nor cared what the old devil meant. He said—"You'd better get yourself to bed," and turned gladly to get away.

"You'll ha' work to do?"

Richmond swung round. There was a sound of appeal in old Trude's voice. Incredible. What devilment was he up to now? Richmond stared. The great swart face was sad—no mistaking its sadness. Richmond stood uncertainly, every nerve in his body alert.

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"I've no work to do at this time of night," he said brusquely.

"Ay, you'll go, you'll go," Trude said sorrowfully, "but you'll not go far. You ha' ideals and dreams. I ha' had dreams. I ha' seen beauty." Richmond was standing over him now, and he plucked the young man's sleeve. "You dream of beauty. But you and I were made from the same clod of earth. You ha' wings, you think. You ha' feet too, rooted in the mud with mine. Will you ha' better dreams than I in your last bed? You'll go, you'll go, but you'll come back. And as for Jael, she'll have to dig deep to bury her father." A glint of malice flickered in his eyes. "You don't like that," he said slyly. "You don't like to remember that Jael is John Trude's daughter, but I'll take my oath she is."

Richmond said harshly—"Do you want me?"

Trude's fingers worked on his arm. "I ha' had a dream," he said eagerly. "I died and they took me through a dozen of great rooms, filled with men that had no faces. There was one that went in front, and had a neat way with her. I thought it was Anne, and likely it was, for she tricked me at the end and left me alone in a place with a throne. Thought I—'Trude, you're dead now and a'most damned. Pluck your courage up and take a look at your judge.' So I lifted my head, and by gad, it might have been a brother of mine that sat there, as like to John Trude as ever a man might be —except that he was no man, but a god, as you could tell by his great hands and his eyes and his voice rolling round the place like thunder. I took heart to ask him where I was, and he said—'On earth, Trude. Where else would a Trude be?' I said—'Lord, I thought I died.' 'You did,' said he, 'but you ha'na left the world. I am the god of this world and you're brother to me. The Trudes endure,' he said. 'Scratch a saint and find a Trude——'"

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Richmond tore his arm violently from the grasping hand. "You swollen fool," he said, "pity you had not died."

Trude flung out his arms in a sweeping gesture. His voice rose echoing round the vaulted roof. "I should ha' died before," he cried. "Mocked I am with life." His face changed. "Listen," he said, and chuckled. "I met a fool once in a god-forgotten valley in California who was asking the world why he'd been born. The rest of the world being drunk on the floor round us, I answered for them. 'Why, fool,' says I, 'to look for your grave.' He was a lean man with yellow hair, and I'd a dear sight rather lie in his grave than mine; it'll be narrower." He glanced humorously over his bulk. "Who would ha' such a monstrous belly," said he, "that turns good wine to gall in the mouth? I doubt I ha' outlived my beauty. If I grow much fatter I shall be smothered in flesh, or fall in and die of a surfeit eating my way out. Sad, sad, damnably sad."

He sank back on the squandered straw, still chuckling in his throat.

Richmond turned away without a backward glance. The blood was beating madly in his temples and he wanted nothing but to get away from all sight and sound of John Trude.

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CHAPTER VII

THE spring came quickly that year. The valley went dourly to sleep one dark March night, and woke in the morning with laughter bubbling in its sparkling streams and echoing from its hills. The air was full of sudden whispers and field and fold grew mazed with fragrance. There had not been such loveliness of spring since the young men died.

Richmond was working again. He spent all day in the barn, covering sheets of paper with the great head and vast limbs of John Trude. He was obsessed with the old man. He hardly thought of him as a man. In every sketch he made, Trude was crouching with lower limbs half-rooted in the earth, or reared with muscles drawn back for a leap. He was no animal: he was sub-human, the lowest blindest force of life. He was mortality, and all things, even beauty, sprang from his vileness.

As Richmond worked he saw the face always more plainly. He thought that it was malicious as well as blind. He wrought sometimes in a cold passion of hate, turning over in his mind the thought of his and all men's kinship with Trude. But when he paused and looked at the clay, the thing he had made was not the thing he saw. It was an old, gigantic man with the face of a bellowing Puck, but it was not the dark, monstrous mocking figure that had haunted his days and nights since the night when he had seen John Trude fantastically naked in the great hall. It was no more than mortal man, and he had wanted to make Mortality.

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A year later he was to destroy every trace of the work and write down as vain and useless the incredible toil of these months. It was not vain. The burning indomitable vitality and the disquieting grace of the young men he modelled afterwards in the golden years of his work spring straight from the anguished effort he made to catch and hold the tortured dangerous spirit of John Trude.

Now as he worked his loathing of Jael's father took shape and worked beside him, taunting and goading him, a dark smothering cloud that came between a man and his courage and between a man and his love.

He avoided Jael. Seeing Trude everywhere, he saw him in his daughter. He cursed himself for an ill-conditioned fool, and when he had to see Jael, showed her an unvarying kindness. She, poor child, had all the time a sense that Richmond was living behind the barrier he had built against her in her absence from him. She hammered against it, bruising her hands and breaking her wings. A vain effort. She half thought that Richmond angry was better than Richmond aloofly kind—at least he was whole-hearted in his wrath, and once, as when he found her in Janet Trude's garden, his anger, melting the barrier, had let through such a warm tide of love that she comforted herself in the memory of it. She tried foolishly to make him angry and shake a serenity that she began to find altogether intolerable.

She did not succeed, perhaps because she did not try very vigorously, but the break came for all that—with another offer for *The Lover.*

Jael wanted him to take the offer. She did not say so, but he read it in her eyes and in her very avoidance of the question. She did not even ask him if he had answered the letter from the would-be purchaser—a Jew who ran about the world buying beautiful things to fill the great house where his

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young wife had lived and died. He offered a fair price.

Jael thought—"He will need the money. Seven hundred pounds is not very much, after all. We can keep the house going, but we can't buy tools and clay and plaster and pay a moulder. He *ought* to sell." But she was afraid to say so.

Richmond took the offer. He wrote to the dealer in whose charge the bronze had been. He wrote to the Jew who worshipped beauty. Jael knew he had written the letters, but he did not tell her what was in them. A perverse pride kept his ears shut against her silent appeal. The words—"I have sold *The Lover*"—became the five hardest words in the language. He could not get them out. . . .

He strode along the lower slopes of Nethermoor and thought resentfully of the sale of the bronze. It was part of the past from which he had so violently sundered himself: while it was his he could have destroyed it when he liked. Now that it had escaped him he thought stubbornly that Jael's unspoken wish had forced his hand. "She is a Trude," he said, "and greedy, like all the Trudes."

The piercing sweet scent of the peat crept round him. His feet sank in the soft wet moss and pools of red-brown water spread under them. Like dim stars in the dusk the white clusters of the guelder rose hung under a crumbling wall. Richmond stood still. He looked at the moment like one of his own fierce young *Charioteers:* the severe gracious poise of his slim body mimicked the swaying stem of the young mountain ash tree at his back.

He watched the night climb up the valley until the hills slept darkly and the valley lay between them like a sheathed sword between great arms.

Suddenly he was sorry for Jael. His love surged up in a rushing tide, and a passion of tenderness for her closed up his throat, choking him. He knew in his heart that what-

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ever she had from John Trude of strength, of stubbornness, of unquenchable vitality, she had not greed, and asked nothing save that he had once given her freely and now had robbed her of and would sell his soul to give her back. With a quickened sense of loss he remembered her standing in the haunted orchard, and saw her eyes, so brave and clear and loving, lifted with shy confidence to his, filled with the radiance of her sweet worshipping spirit: he heard her small voice: it came from a long way off, from the shadows of the distant hill, wind-borne and faint and infinitely sweet. He could not hear the things it said. . . .

Back at Trudesthorp a perverse pride seized him. He ignored Jael's different advances and the caressing gesture of her hands when she touched his arm, but at last he said—"I've written about *The Lover.*"

Jael waited until she could wait no longer, and then asked eagerly—"What did you say to them?"

He frowned. "I sold it," he told her briefly.

Jael said nervously—"Are you—did you mind selling it?"

"What else could I do?" he said harshly.

After a while he saw that Jael was crying. She leaned against the cushions of her chair; her eyes were closed and she was crying silently. Once or twice she put up a hand to brush her tears away, holding herself very still, with her face turned away from him.

He watched her stealthily. He could not endure tears—least of all hers—but he would not move. He waited until every nerve in his body was on edge, and then he gave way to an uncontrollable desire to hurt her.

"Be quiet," he said, "are you going to make a fool of yourself all night?"

She sat rigid. A flush of startled shame covered her face and throat. It ebbed and left her pale. Suddenly a queer

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childish rage seized her. She jumped to her feet and ran across the room and bent a white furious face on Richmond, with trembling lips and eyes shining through their hot tears.

"You shall not talk so," she said, choking. "You shall not. You care for nothing, nothing. You jeer at me. You make everything dull and hateful. You are like all the dull, stupid, bad-tempered husbands in the world. I won't have it." She stammered absurdly. "I won't turn into a frightened dull wife to please you. I won't, I tell you."

Then Richmond laughed, and she struck at him with her small clenched fists, struck him on his shoulder and on his arm.

He caught at her wrists. "That's enough," he said softly. "It's too much. I've had too much. You're a silly girl. Be quiet, or I'll bring Theodocia to you." His mouth was shut in that hard relentless line. She seemed to grow weak in his grasp and he let her go: she stood for a moment looking at him with dilated eyes, and pushed her hair from her face in a nervous gesture. Then she turned and went slowly away. He heard her footsteps on the stairs.

He stood still where she had left him. His anger with her had died, and he was sick at heart. He wondered if she were lying crying on her bed. She would make herself ill, and she had to get up so early and work so hard. He said—"Oh, my dear, my dear," and at last could not bear it and went upstairs, saying to himself as he went—"She can say anything she likes. I *will* keep my temper. I deserve all she can say or do."

But she said nothing at all. She was in bed, and when he came into the room and lit a candle she looked so white and pitifully small that he flung himself beside her and they clung together, comforting one another, her slender arms tightly round his neck and her cold face laid against his.

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She said softly—"Oh did I hurt you? Dear, did I hurt you?"

He could not answer her. He kissed her hands and laid them against his heart.

"They struck you," she said painfully. "Oh Richmond, I am ashamed."

"Ashamed," he groaned, and pressed his hot cheek into the curve of her shoulder. She saw that he could not speak and tried to comfort him with soft words, until he lifted his head and looked at her.

"You hate me, Jael?" he said queerly.

She drew him close so that he could hear the whispered words. "Say 'dear wife.'"

"Dear love, dear wife."

"Dear husband," she said softly, and lifted her small radiant face.

He kissed it, and sitting up on the edge of the bed nursed her in his arms, closing her eyelids with gentle fingers. His face was drawn and strange, and his eyes under the long down-curving brows were dark with some nagging thought. His shoulders drooped as if his wild strength were utterly spent. If Jael had not been lying with closed eyes, herself tired out, she must have seen that more than weariness drew down the corners of his mouth and wiped the youth from his brooding face.

He held her until he thought she slept. Her hair fell across his arm and stirred in the gentle air that came warm from the warm earth through the window beside her bed. He hardly saw her face, so small it was, and sunken in the hollow of his arm. He hardly heard her breathe, so lightly she breathed and lay lightly against him. He had been half bending over her as he sat, and now his body ached with the effort of holding himself in that bent stillness. He began to find himself struggling

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with a sharp and definite impulse to wake her and hold her while he told her yet another tale of the life that had been lived away from her. Not a tale of things suffered, this, not a tale of courage beaten and laughter stilled, like the tale of Paul's death, nor a tale of savage, blasting horror, but a tale of common treachery, a tale to wound and spoil her, to take the joy from her youth and the lilt from her step. He would hold her so close that she could not escape. Her eyes would grow dark and wide with pain, and she would cry out to be free of his hands so that she could hide herself, too humiliated to cry before him. He would tell her the whole thing, and if she turned from him—well and good, he would be free. And if she did not turn away—if she said, "Oh my love, be comforted," he would lie on her breast as he had lain before, when her body was a wonder and a mystery to him and he so very glad of her.

Unconsciously his hold tightened, so that she stirred and murmured. His mind shrank back appalled from its own impulse. Carefully, he drew his arm away and laid her down on the pillow, slowly and carefully straightened his aching body and slipped out of the room. "If I stay I shall wake her and tell her," he thought. "Cruel, cruel." He stood in his own room and felt stifled by the walls and the narrow bed. "I can't stay here," he said, and dragging the blankets from his bed went softly down the stairs and out through the walled garden to the orchard.

The sky above him had that soft lustrous darkness which in the short nights of late Spring all night through promises the dawn. The air was very warm, so warm that the dew on the grass comforted his hands. He lay with wide eyes looking through the twisted apple branches and thought how kindly the arm of the hills curved above the valley. The night, too, was kind and smoothed the hard lines from his face, touch-

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ing his eyes with quietness and his limbs with peace. He thought of Jael. First of all he remembered how on such a night as this they stood here and she leaned against his shoulder and looked at him with shining maiden eyes, so that he had grown dizzy seeing her innocence on fire at his touch. She had been lovely then and given him love with small prodigal hands. He had found her kind and generous and gay, and yet he had not known her as now he knew her. In the years of their marriage he had learned that her kindness sprang from the clear cool springs of lovingkindness by which her spirit lived. He had found courage beneath her gaiety, a tempered courage, like cool sharp steel, and a sweet and shining honesty. Lying in the quiet night he thought for a long time of her ungrudging acceptance of their poverty, and remembered with what gladness she had worked for him in his studio, and thought how hard, because Theodocia was getting old, she worked now in the house and cared for him and David and Jude, and had, it seemed, so few joys and was yet so joyous.

A memory came, sudden and blinding, of Jael standing before a wardrobe of which one whole side was given over to the frock bought in London. There it hung, in the vast shadowy recess, swathed in soft paper and hung about with lavender. Jael had been touching it with one reverent finger, and as he came into the room turned and said softly—"The most glorious frock." Tears burned behind his eyelids, not bitter tears, and opening his eyes to blink them away, he saw her coming to him across the orchard.

She had put her coat over her nightgown, and her bare feet, in heelless slippers, were whiter than the flowers bending in the long grass. Her face was grave and her eyes were shy and kind, and her voice when she said—"Why did you go?" was drowsy sweet. She knelt beside him on the blanket.

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He touched her gently and thought that if ivory were warm and breathed she might have been fashioned of rare ivory, from shoulders to narrow feet.

"Are you cold?" he whispered.

She shook her head.

"You should live in an orchard," he said dreamily. "You are cool and soft, like apple blossom. Can you hear the leaves whispering round you, Jael? They were quite still before you came."

"Are you sorry I came?"

"I love you best here," he said, "with the cool grass for your couch and the stars for your candles. The stars are pale, like your dear face, my wife." His hands were kind.

She stirred. "Do you love me so much?"

He pushed her coat gently off her shoulders.

"Like apple blossom," he whispered, "and your breasts like small round apples." She saw his hovering smile and thought it very dear. "Theocritus said—*'Earliest apples are ripe,'*" he told her softly. And added—"Don't you like me to kiss you, Blossoms? Look up."

Her eyes were shamefast, but her heart was quiet and comforted.

"Shouldn't I kiss the body of my love?" he said. "So dear and beautiful as it is."

Her hands moved upwards to his face. "Richmond," she said, and stopped. He felt her heart quickening in her breast.

"What is it, dear?"

She gave him a grave burning look that he could not fathom. "You think so?" she asked. He could hardly hear her. "Is there——" she said and faltering, began again. "Do you know one more beautiful? More dear—to you? Oh, forgive me."

"I might have seen," he said steadily, "or imagined a

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woman different and as beautiful, but she would not be the body of my love. She would never have been a wonder and a delight to me. As you were, my wife." His voice changed. "As you are." He cried—"Oh Jael, I love you, I love you so."

After a while she said—"Shut your eyes. I cannot talk to you if you look at me so." He waited.

She spoke shyly. "If there were some way I could serve you—— I think often how useless I am. I do wild things and say wicked things. But there's no part of me that isn't yours. I love you with my thoughts and my body worships yours. You know it."

He would not let her speak. He shut her in his arms and felt that her lips trembled and her limbs were held in a strange weakness.

"You care too much," he said pitifully. "And I am not kind. I *will* be kind."

She slept. The stars grew dim and the sky beyond the hills gleamed honey-pale, and as he watched the hills were crowned with light and the ruffled clouds became a myriad leaping flames.

He turned his head to look at Jael, and saw that she smiled still as she slept. "Dear," he said softly, thinking how brave and honest a lover she was, and single-minded as a child. And then he grew a little cold and afraid, because she was not a child and gave him no childish love, but an eager and passionate adoration and tenderness that could comfort his whole body. Queerly, he remembered the night he found her lying in the walled garden, and thought that now he understood what before had seemed wilful madness. It had not been madness, but had sprung somehow from her strange, burning simplicity. She could be too deeply moved—dreamy, passionate, half-elfin as she was—until she lost herself and for the time *was*

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joy or grief or love. He thought—"If she knew I had failed her—— Did anyone ever die of grief?"

He sat up and the movement woke her. For a while she lay wide-eyed and drowsy, and at last said happily—"Don't you think this orchard is a dear place? Almost as dear as Weetwood."

"The enchanted wood," he said, and smiled at her. "Did you think I had forgotten it?"

Flushed and radiant in the sunlight, she ran across the grass, and pausing a moment in the doorway of the walled garden, looked back and saw him watching her, with head held back and ruffled hair and laughter still on his lips.

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BOOK IV

"So there we had music and dancing and what else was meet to fill up the pleasure. And, I daresay, my lady herself is an admirable well-bred gentlewoman, and Mr. Lechery is as pretty a fellow."—*Pilgrim's Progress.*

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CHAPTER I

RICHMOND was profoundly dissatisfied with his work. The more carefully and arduously he modelled the body of John Trude the farther the strange spirit of him fled. He cared nothing at all to model bodies excellently if the soul evaded him, and one day locked the studio door behind him and turning from the house and Jael's questioning eyes wandered through the lower fields.

For the first time since he came to Trudesthorp he walked over what he believed to be the whole of John Trude's land and saw its desolation with a new sharpness of vision. The place had got worse since he married Jael, but he had never realized how much worse. The lower fields were lovely enough, being meadow-land, but wild and rank, and the fences were a sorry ruin. There was not a gate on the estate. As he turned back and walked up the hill-side he passed acre after acre of thistle-ridden land and fields half covered with gorse and heather, overgrown copses, ruined sheds, choked ditches, and near the house itself a wilderness of neglected lawn and terraces where hemlocks had pushed between the flagstones, cracking and upturning them, and moss grew thick on the wide stone steps.

He was standing above Trudesthorp on the edge of the moor road looking down over the upper fields when Mrs. Bellber halted beside him her wicked overgrown bay.

"Are you looking at your inheritance?" she asked, and laughed.

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"Not mine," he said abruptly, fretted by her tone.

"What's Jael's yours," she retorted coolly, and added—"A pretty wreck, by God, and rotting to pieces with its owner. The best land in the valley belongs to John Trude, th' old fool."

"You think so?" he said politely.

"I know ut. Nicholas Trude bought well and all along the valley. Trude's land is like a great wedge with the thin end running up round Trudesthorp. He'd more sense than to clutter himself up with acres of intake. Not that there isn't some good in ut even up here," she added, and waved an arm over the upper fields. The bay lashed out viciously.

"Why don't you keep the brute still?" Richmond said angrily.

"God bless us," she answered placidly, "you're rough-tongued these days. Does Jael get the edge of it?" Her face changed. "Don't glower at me like that, Richmond Drew. I'll not have ut. You should ha' more respect for your elders."

He smiled his mischievous faun's smile. "I'll take a hiding," he said, and looked up at her with mirthful eyes.

"You'd be better for it," she said grimly, but her voice was kinder when she spoke again. "You've no easy time at Trudesthorp, I'll be bound. A pity Jude was lamed. He should ha' been taking this in hand now. It'll be near worthless when it comes to him and 'ud drink money like rain. He should ha' had your strength. But you have no interest in the place."

She left him and rode off, thinking painfully that the boy was changed and wondering if Jael knew it.

Richmond stood still, and after a while went back to Trudesthorp and asked Jael just how far John Trude's land went. She told him, wondering a little, but he had nothing further to say and sat all evening in a moody silence. She

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had noted the locked studio, but she was afraid to question him.

He got up very early on the next day and rode down the bridle path to the valley. Dew lay heavy on field and hedge, and from the wet earth rose a thin poignant scent. He felt a stirring in his blood, and the aching sense of disappointment that had weighed on him since the day before, lightened manifestly. This was clay that a man could mould, clay warm and bursting with life, clay that cried aloud for the hand of the moulder. And where he stood was the poorest of Trude's land. Round the bend of the valley, where the beck's walls fell away, the stream, no longer tortured and confined, bent silently the meadow grass and plashed between the pastures that had bred Nicholas Trude's dun Jerseys, the richest pastures in all that wide rich valley. The land on both sides of the beck was Trude's, a pool of green and living beauty cupped in the hollow of the hills.

Richmond lifted his eyes and saw white placid clouds drowsing the burning turquoise of the sky. He slipped from his mare and stood beside the uncut hedge. His shoulder touched a branch, and a wild rose lost her wide petals and spilled her secret wine, chill as snow-cooled Falernian, upon his upturned face. He brushed the drops away and laughed softly —"A sign," he said, "a baptism." Exultant laughter bubbled at his lips. "A man could do wonders with this," he cried again, and turning the mare round in the narrow path got up and rode slowly back to Trudesthorp.

Jael stood in the doorway and gave him a shy friendly smile. He lifted her off her feet and kissed her and laughed gaily when she blushed. "You've never got used to being married, have you?" he said mischievously. "You make me feel a complete rake. And before breakfast, too. Most demoralizin'."

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But Jael had fled. He washed his hands and found her waiting for him at the breakfast table. He kissed her again because he found adorably inviting her narrow delicate face and ardent mouth. "You're getting brown," he said. "I like you just as well when you're brown. *'They all call thee a gipsy, gracious one, but I am wild for love of thee.'* You look like a little girl, and you're twenty-seven. Are you always going to look like this? When I'm old and long in the tooth will you be leading me by the hand and talking kindly in your little voice?"

He checked an impulse to tell her of the exultant delight that had come to him on the bridle-path. There was nothing definite he could say. He had no plans, only a dream, a hot and heady dream, that words would shatter and dissolve. Instinctively, he shrank from words about it. If he said—"I'd like to put Trude's land in order," where would the dream be? Cold, dead, vanished in an instant. And Jael would protest. "Your work. Your art." Richmond grew hot at the very notion and hugged his new thought in secret.

He was no fool, however. He put it to the test of days of thinking, and found that though the exultant thrill did not revisit him, the warmth and comfort stayed. His passion for the task grew by thinking on. It was deepened and steadied by a conviction of its strange, unshakeable rightness. He could neither endure to stand again before the half-modelled figure of John Trude nor turn his hand to any other thing while that so held and maddened him, mocking his impotence. The very energy, restless and magnificent, of which his art was the supreme gesture, drove him away from it now. He turned its full force, a resistless thrusting tide, to the service of another dream and a new beauty.

He walked over the estate with a sharpened vision, seeing fences up and gates in their place, the corn-land turned over

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and ready for next year's sowing, sheds rebuilt, the pasture emerging from its rank luxuriance, the whole wide stretch cleared and laughing, "with a laugh broad as a thousand beeves at pasture."

He was young, not thirty, strong as any man in the dales. Thought of the money that would be swallowed up before anything was done halted him only a little. There was a way out of that. The place had never been mortgaged. Richmond's mind turned avidly on half a dozen different expedients. And all the time he brooded and ground his thought over the rotting bulk of John Trude—that blind inhuman thing, sucking the life and goodness from these fields he coveted. In hot restless nights and chill dawns he came to realize with what a fierce and craving passion he now coveted Trude's land.

His ignorance was vast, but not so profound that he did not know just how ignorant he was. There was a way out of ignorance, too. He took to riding over to Starcross and there listened to Bellber discoursing of pedigree cattle. Once he asked that hard-mouthed man how he would set about the regeneration of Trude's land, and from the flood of words that followed guessed that Bellber hankered after it himself and had a thousand times in his own mind contemplated, slow dales' fashion, every aspect and contour of the place.

He listened until Bellber's habitual caution awoke and he asked bleakly—"Were ye thinking of farming Trude's land for him?"

Richmond's mouth set in a hard unkindly line. "I farm no land of John Trude's," he said, and went his way.

"That's a tight-lipped youngster," Bellber grumbled. "And 'ull wait a long time for dead men's shoes. John Trude must ha' the black strength of the devil in him. He'll not die this night, to please his daughter's husband." He paused and added savagely, "A bitter mouthful, that one. Ah looked at

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me as if I were nowt. He's grown since I saw 'un last."

"He's grown as he wasn't meant to," Mrs. Bellber retorted. "The lad's wry-mouthed and over set on his way."

Richmond's way was queerer than Mrs. Bellber would have believed. It took him that night into the great hall in search of John Trude, whom he found uncommonly sober and sitting before the fire that even in midsummer never went out on the great hearth.

It was no part of Richmond's way to deal with a sober Trude, and he sat himself coolly to drink with the man, drinking cautiously himself and watching floods of madeira pour down Trude's vast gullet with no outer effect on him save a richer purple surging in the monstrous column of his throat and a yellow gleam that pricked through the thickets of his eyebrows from the sunken raddled eyepits and met Richmond's own watchful gaze with disconcerting steadiness.

Trude asked malicious questions about Richmond's work, which the young man parried and at last said abruptly—"I do no work. I walk about your land and think what a fool you are."

"It's good land," Trude said meditatively. "None better."

"It's rotting," Richmond retorted. "The moor's taking back half the upper fields."

Trude waved a hand. "Nothing," he said, "a nothing. I ha' enough and to spare of better fields."

"All empty," Richmond said shortly. "Except of thistles."

Trude chuckled. "I ha' heard that Bellber swore to salt the place down if I didn't have 'em cut. I sent to tell him I'd cut 'em myself if I'd owt as sharp as his wife's tongue." He shook prodigiously, and Richmond eyed the heaving strangled bulk. "He'll die in a fit," thought he, "and Bellber will swear I choked him."

But Trude recovered and said soberly—"I ha'na liked

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Bellber since ah rode here in wartime to grumble about my fences and sat champing his food and talking bloody nonsense about killing. I dare say he thought he was chewing Germans, for he grinned like a fool and slavered in his glass. I cannot tell how he came to breed four decent sons."

"Bellber casts eyes on your land," Richmond said slowly.

"It marches with his on the west," Trude said. "I had rather give the lot to old Martha than lend him a handful of it to stop a hole."

"You'd better give it to me," Richmond said boldly. His head was dizzy with heat and wine, and his eyes had begun to play him tricks: he saw Trude swelled to such monstrous proportions that he looked more like a nightmare than a man. His head wagged on a chest as broad as a hill-side and his voice came rumbling from the bottom of a pit.

Trude began to laugh again. The veins stood out on him like clusters of grapes, he sucked in great rushing breaths and blew them out with choked bellowing noises. Richmond's gorge rose and he stood up, swaying and glaring at Trude, and thought wildly of crashing a fist through that fantastic fungus of a face. With effort after violent effort Trude got his breath again. "Good gad," said he, "you can ha' it. I ha'na laughed so much since Tess was shrived."

Richmond felt cold, bitter cold. He sat in his chair and stared at Trude. His bolt was shot and he saw how monstrous had been his folly. A violent shuddering seized him. He could not now imagine what crazy thought had brought him to hear Trude's jeering laughter. For days he had been stalking Trude's land as if he owned it, and now had made Trude a present of the jest. God, how the old devil would relish it. Richmond set his teeth on the wave of nausea that rose to them.

Trude said clearly—"You can ha' it. I ha' no use for it.

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Take it. I've a mind to spite the other. Dear fellah. Drags a leg and curses his father. I've seen him at it, and I've seen un sick with fright, too."

Richmond said never a word, and Trude said petulantly —"Doesn't the fool want ut? You asked for ut, didn't you?"

"You've a pretty wit," Richmond said slowly. "I suppose you thought I'd take you at your word. I'm drunk and you're infernally sober, but I'm not crazy drunk."

"You're crazy ill-tempered," Trude retorted. "I ha' just given you I forget how many thousand acres of the best land in England, and you ha'na as much as said—'Thank you, father-in-law.' "

Richmond sat bolt upright and smiled sourly. "Will you sign a deed of gift?" he asked.

"I'd rather eat fox than deal with lawyers," Trude said angrily. "I ha' given you the land. God bless my soul, you're as greedy as the devil."

"I'd need to be cleverer than any devil to deal with you," Richmond retorted coolly. "Who'd believe me if I told 'em John Trude had given me his land?" He had got all his wits again and a bitter reckless mirth filled him. He choked it down and prepared to play Trude's game to its crazy end.

Trude's mouth widened. "Not Bellber," he said, and thumped a fist on his knee.

"Then don't talk to me of gifts," Richmond said.

"You've a gracious way with you," Trude mocked. "Should I ha' gone down on my knees and begged you to accept ut? If I had not passed my word and you were less of a fool and I less weary of everything but a new folly and everyone but such fools as you be, I'd take it back. By'r lard, I would."

"Will you have a lawyer?" Richmond said again.

Trude flung up his arms. "The man's demented," he

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roared. "Will I ha' a lawyer? Will I drink sour wine, and ha' Martha Sheldon to warm my bed? Will I hang myself to feed crows?" His voice dropped suddenly. "Bring your lawyer," he said softly, "and if I like him I'll do ut."

Richmond got out into the open and lay for an hour half buried in the wet grass of the lawn. The cool night air and the scent of the dew-soaked earth slowly steadied him, but he could not go to sleep. He walked all night about the moor and in the morning set calmly about arranging the deed of gift. If Trude were jesting, let him jest: maybe another fit of laughter would strangle him in his own writhing bulk. If he were soberly mad and kept his word, so much the better. Richmond thrust out his jaw in the bitter cruel line that Jael dreaded, and risked the toss.

He won. Amazingly, he won. John Trude signed away his land to Richmond Drew, signed soberly and made a grim jest and said he hoped his sweet son-in-law would not turn him out in his naked age to chew acorns and rave like Lear in a thunderstorm.

Richmond laughed gently and got himself out of the great hall with as polite a face as he could put on the affair, his brain reeling a little, but himself on the whole marvellously cool and unmoved by his triumph. He was master of Trudesthorp lands, and he felt nothing but a curious, sardonic sense of ease as he looked over his neglected estates. A distant sight of Jude, riding furiously across the moor, struck him with a sudden pang, but he quieted that thrust of conscience easily enough. He meant no harm to Jude and he had not cheated the old devil, Jude's father, but asked him fairly for the land and got it, snatching from the hands of that swollen old drunkard a precious thing he had neither wits nor decency to use. His mouth shut down tightly as he strode towards the house, turning over in his head the business of mortgaging the estate

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and the more pressing business of learning how to handle it.

A thought, that had all the time been hovering in the background of his mind, took shape suddenly and thrust itself plainly out. His stride quickened and he shook his head. "Better not," he said aloud, but the thought fascinated him and he pondered over it for half an hour before going in search of Jael.

Jael listened in silence while he told her what he had done. He told her shortly and hardly. She was startled beyond measure, and a burning resentment began slowly to well in her mind because of the way he had done this thing. She struggled against it and against a queer prick of scorn, but resentment got the better of her, pushing and thrusting up as if the whole dumb force of Trudesthorp lands were throbbing in her veins and crying with her tongue. She was for this moment wholly Trude, and the dark malicious Trude temper smouldered in her eyes. Her heart was beating furiously, and she pressed both hands on her breast. She was afraid Richmond would see how he had startled her, and he did see and laughed at her.

"Do you think I've stolen Trudesthorp?" he jeered.

She said slowly—"I see little difference in what you've done."

He winced at that for all his bitter guard, and said harshly—"You have strange thoughts of me, Jael."

She cried out, drowning the Trude voices in her heart. "It wasn't yours. It was Jude's—and mine. You could have had all mine. I'd have given it you gladly. I'd have asked Jude to give you his. But for you to go, without a word, and trick my father out of it—as if we were strangers to you. As if you hated us. I don't understand. Why did you want it? I don't understand at all. Did you want money?" Her voice broke. "You wouldn't *sell* Trudesthorp, Richmond?"

"I'd do any damn thing I liked with it," he said violently.

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"Money." He stammered. "What sort of a thief do you take me for?"

She shrank from his furious face and put out her hand. "Richmond," she said unhappily. "If I knew why you wanted it. Why you had to get it that way. Couldn't it have waited till he died? I—I have the right to be told about it."

"I took it," he said deliberately, "to please myself. I don't choose to see good land go to rack and ruin because a vile old man, rotten with drink, a monstrous blotch of flesh, owns it and neglects it."

She went very white, and steadied herself to say slowly—"John Trude may be vile, may be all you say, but he never tricked another man out of his land, nor cheated a lame boy."

"Oh, very sad," he mocked, "damnably sad. The lame boy—an excellent touch."

He left her.

Jael stood still. The colour came slowly back to her face and her eyes were no longer hot and angry. She was cold and conscious only of a dull sense of hostility to Richmond. He was an alien and an enemy of her blood. The division between them was complete and unbridgeable. He had wrenched himself violently away and now faced her, unfriendly, strange. She said—"It's over. It's been over a long time. There isn't any Richmond. Richmond died in France."

But as she said the words, she clasped her hands convulsively. A sharp pain struck at her through the numbed sense of estrangement the pressed on her thoughts. She said—"It's over," and her mouth shut narrowly and her fleeting resemblance to John Trude at his most unkind and puckish grew sharp and hard.

She wondered to find her cheeks wet with tears, that came at first slowly under her closed eyelids and then in a swift flood. "Why are you crying?" she said queerly. "There's no

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need to cry. You can't be hurt by anything a stranger chooses to do to you or yours. You're angry. You're not hurt."

She would not acknowledge the wound that under all show of cold apathy throbbed wretchedly. Nor acknowledge that if Richmond had not hidden the whole thing from her she would have cared nothing at all for the tricking of John Trude.

She shrugged her shoulders in a rather pitiful nonchalance. "Oh well," she said lightly, lips trembling, and eyes blinking away their last tears, "you could have had all my share of our land for the asking, my dear. There was no need to plot against me. So melodramatic of you, I think."

She heard David calling and went quickly.

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CHAPTER II

JUDE took the news with an odd indifference. He stood with his back half turned to Richmond and let Richmond tell the whole tale through without comment. At the end he looked round with a fleeting smile. "You're welcome to the land," he said. "You're Jael's husband, and you've been cleverer than that old devil."

Richmond, who had been stung to rage by Jael's contemptuous anger, found this boy's placid indifference hard to bear.

"It's your land," he said slowly.

Jude shrugged. "Don't bother to feel like that. It wasn't any use to me. I dare say we'd have had to sell it. It doesn't seem likely my father has any money to leave us, though Theodocia swears he has." He let one glance flicker downwards over himself. "And I'm no damned use."

Cold water would have shocked Richmond less. The mad restless desires that had consumed him since he first looked out over Trude's land and coveted it, dropped clean away. The fever left his veins. He felt naked and empty and a little light-headed, but he flung back his head and laughed, feeling neither bitterness nor any doubt what he would do.

"You young idiot," he said cheerfully. "Did you suppose I'd keep it? I got it for you and Jael." He paused and added carefully—"That is to say, I got it for myself, because I wanted it. But I'm not going to keep it, don't you know."

Jude looked at him with a shy smile so oddly like Jael's

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that Richmond was a little startled. "Give Jael her share and keep mine," he said. "What could I do with all that land? I couldn't afford to grow a blade of grass. It's in a frightful state. What shall you do with it?" He hesitated. Richmond watched the boy's dark, thick lashes brush his hot cheeks. The sudden flush died and Jude laughed.

"There'd be something I could do?" he asked coolly. "In the way of helping you, I mean." His mouth twitched humorously. "I couldn't possibly keep hens. Don't ask me to. They're such stupid birds, I think."

He turned to the window again, with a swift swinging motion of the lithe body that his leg, dragging uselessly behind, so intolerably mocked and fretted. Richmond could not see his face, but for one instant had seen in it a hunger that left him shaken and hot with pity. The boy was tortured, he was *flayed* with the consciousness of failure. Richmond grew still hotter with remorse for his blindness. There had been a thousand ways he could have helped the boy, if he had known. He cursed himself savagely for a selfish fool, and resolved, by God, to make amends.

He said steadily—"Unless you're willing to do your share the whole thing falls through, you know. We can raise the money and you've got to run the place. I'll stand by you until it's in order, but after that I've got my own work to do." Jude faced round and Richmond looked away because he could not bear the light that came slowly into the boy's eyes. He went on carefully. "Of course, we're both babes. We've still got to learn the job. I don't think I could learn mine up here, and I've half a mind to go down to one of the big farms in the south of England." He paused. His bright eyes, so curiously tilted, were very bright at the moment, and more than ever like a faun's—wild, and a little heartless. "There was a place in Kent," he said musingly. "I saw it once. We made a

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forced landing. A big place, in glorious order. The man showed us over it. A complacent greedy devil, I thought, but all farmers are greedy. They called him Marsh, Robert Marsh." His voice changed, and he said—"You could learn a lot from Bellber and some of the others, and I'll teach you the rest. There are books you can read, too." He waved a vague hand. "We shall make a devil of a mess of some things, but I think we'll pull through." He smiled, a gay frank smile, and put his hand on Jude's arm. "Are you game?"

"Game?" Jude choked. His tongue, that he had taught so many arrogant things and mocking unkindly things, faltered and failed him entirely. He was conscious of a swelling ache at the base of his throat, and he saw Richmond through a floating haze.

Richmond's voice sounded distant and anxious. "Go steady, my dear," it said, and making a vast effort, Jude went steady: the world came back into perspective and the roaring in his ears ceased. He put his hands in his pockets and achieved a laugh like the crow of a feeble young cockerel.

"I'll work like hell," he said fervently.

Richmond laughed and began a long and mercifully wordy explanation of mortgages, and when he saw that Jude was now calmly feeling his way into the new order, he stopped and said—"I rather misled Jael. I left her thinking I'd stolen your land from you." His smile was not pleasant. "As I had, of course."

He checked Jude's swift protest. "If you can manage it, I'd rather you didn't undeceive her." He saw Jude's perplexed frown and added—"I want to speak to her about it myself. This evening, I think."

But before evening came, Richmond was riding with all haste he could to see his father. John Drew was dying and not taking longer about it than he must. He lay in his bed, a very

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ghost of a man, parched like a leaf and talking—though only a little—in a thin rustling voice.

A dry choking heat had consumed him for two days. He complained to his son that the blood in his veins was dried to dust and his breath like thin bitter smoke.

"I am so dry," said he, "that I shall burn like old timber." His lips twitched in a dim mocking smile.

"Why didn't you send for me before?" Richmond asked harshly.

"So I would have done," the elder man murmured, "if I'd thought you knew a way to water this intolerable dryness." He began to talk a little petulantly of his own father. "I had rather have outrun him," he said. "It would ha' looked better, and he'll have the laugh of me, you'll see. He must be half through his eighties, and I dare swear he'll live out another ten."

The canopy of the bed stirred in the breeze, and the dying man's hand plucked at his sheets.

"Are you cold?" Richmond asked.

"You're a fool," John Drew said bitterly. "You'll be out in the fields on a hot day and a freezing night asking some dried-up thistle stalk if it's warm or cold. I ha' as much sap in me and feel as quick."

Richmond sat silent. The sun had almost sunk behind the hills and its last rays turned to a flecked and molten bronze the dark walnut of the bedposts. His father's eyes were closed, but so transparent were his wide eyelids that Richmond fancied he saw through them. He started from confused and heavy thoughts to find John Drew eyeing him with something like malevolence.

"We're a pair," John Drew said. "I'm burned out and you're burning." He added—"Young wood burns longest and hottest," and seemed pleased with the phrase.

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Richmond looked at the narrow colourless face and tried to remember some kindly intimate thing that thought on might loosen his tongue and melt the hard icy barrier rearing itself between them. He could remember nothing, no day when John Drew had been other than an aloof ironic shade, setting between himself and his son's warm youth a chill and mocking courtesy. Once he had been shyly proud to work for his father: he could remember that, and remember, too, how John Drew had turned that pride aside so that it pierced his son's own eager heart. Richmond sighed. Yet there must have been a day when this dim image of a man had been warm and exulted in the sun, and loved his wife and been pleased somewhat with his son.

Richmond's glance softened. He leaned forward. "Isn't there anything," he said earnestly, "anything at all that I can do for you?"

John Drew turned his face half round into the pillow and fixed his son with one sardonic browless eye. "You can weep," he said softly, "a few salt tears, for decency. And dry them when decency permits." He drew a rustling breath. "How parched I am," he whispered. "Gad, I can hear the breath scrape in my lungs."

Richmond brought him a drink of water. He took only a few drops, and began a crackling sound that Richmond saw presently to be laughter, stretching the thin avid lips. "Spend my money wisely, boy," he whispered, "for it'll breed you no more."

"You have no money," Richmond said harshly.

"I've left you near fifteen thousand." John Drew smiled his thin smile. "Where did you think your mother's ten had gone?"

"You told me there was nothing."

"And you, being a fool, believed me." Like a clatter of thin reeds, his voice filled the room for a space and sank to a whispering cry.

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"I don't understand," Richmond said wearily. "I hadn't asked you for money. Why lie to me about it?"

"Because I didn't choose to see John Trude's wench spending it," his father retorted. The brief flame sank in his eyes and his lips twisted into the ironic smile that had been his habitual way with life. He mocked himself as he mocked others, so that he could keep life at arm's length. "And that's not true either," he murmured. "I lied about it because I wanted it myself." His face changed. He stirred restlessly. "Is it darkening, Richmond?" he asked.

Richmond set the casements wide open to the creeping dusk, and hearing a new sound behind him, turned and saw that John Drew's face had suffered another change. It was still, and bore a patient gentle air. John Drew was dead.

Richmond stood a moment looking down at the thin body that made so poor a showing in the large bed and the narrow face that made so peaceful a one. He felt a brief quickening of his pulses that was not sorrow, but in some detached way an involuntary stirring of respect. He thought—"He was always afraid of life, but he never let life guess it," and then he wondered why he felt so little moved, and looked again at the dead face to see whether it were not a little dear to him. He was cold and shivered in the warm air.

After a while he went downstairs and sent a message to Jael and another to the village, and going back to his father's bedroom sat down to watch there through the short night, carrying with him the candles that custom, in the person of John Drew's old body servant, thrust into his hand.

He sat down in the broad embrasure of the window and considered the changed aspect of his life. . . .

A wind came crashing off the moor. It shook the house and ripped through the trees like a sword swung in a giant hand. Its mad sudden onrush blew out the candles and tossed the

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hangings of the bed across the still sleeper. Richmond leaned out of the window. His spirits rose to ecstasy: he lifted his face to the darkening sky and thought it fitting that the company of Drews should come on a storm of wind to meet their new-dead, remembering an earlier John Drew whose delicate beauty and golden-tongued eloquence had warred with his iron body and restless soul until the night when his enemies caught him defenceless in a house, so that rather than die between walls he rode out to meet them in a great wind, laughing a great laugh as he rode. Richmond caught an echo of laughter in the wind that roared past his ears. For a few moments, in the presence of death, life had become splendid and lyrical and poignantly lovely. . . .

The wind had dropped to a murmur. He felt cold and lonely: he lit the candles again, and sprawling on the broad low seat, stared with eyes that saw nothing of the things on which they rested, into the luminous night. The candles flickered in the heavy air of the room and cast round him a dim hovering glow. His chin was sunk into his chest and his brooding face wore an air at once unhappy and strangely youthful. John Drew, lying with closed eyes, at ease with death, got no prayers or thoughts to speed him. Let us hope his unhouseled spirit did not need them, for his son had utterly forgotten him. . . .

Jael slipped like a mute appealing ghost into his thoughts, that had been far enough from her and dwelt now with a queer pity on the burning kindness of her eyes as she came towards him down the shadowy staircase on the night of his homecoming, and her beauty that ran through him like wine, pierced his senses like sharp stinging wine, torturing him with regret and soothing him with a warm ineffable love.

He had come back to her like a man coming to life, a swimmer bruised and shattered by the waves, emerging hardly into the ecstasy of the sun. He wondered dully now why the mem-

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ory of his treachery should so hurt and nag at him, coming between him and Jael with an undying bitterness. It was so ordinary a treachery. He thought—"Hundreds of men——" and grew on an instant hot with the inexplicable anguish that filled him always when he remembered it, as if Jael herself were suffering in him. As if she were so dear and intimate a part of him that her hands were always on this irking secret of his, tearing at it in uncomprehending wonder—so that he had to force the clinging fingers away, strike at them savagely, bruise them, wound them. He shuddered.

He realized suddenly that he was stiff and cold. Light, like a chill grey mist, had crept into the room. It was that dead hour of half-dawn when nothing stirs and life runs at its lowest ebb. He stood up, and walking awkwardly snuffed out the guttering candles and wondered afresh that John Drew's face was so white and serene. He looked closer for the ironic smile that should have twisted the narrow mouth. John Drew would have relished the pretty jest of his son's vigil. Death on the bed and the solitary watcher dreaming of his jolly mistress.

An obscure resentment flickered up in Richmond's weary brain. He cried suddenly—"Oh, leave me alone," and thrust out violent hands. Jael's fingers twisted and clung. His mouth shut in hard impatient lines.

When the women came from the village he set off for Trudesthorp. The wind blew round him with an indescribable softness and in the rapturous morning air the sweet crying of the birds surprised him as if he had never heard it before.

He ran, jumping from grassy hillock to hillock, down the last slope to Trudesthorp.

Jael was up and offered him a soft diffident caress, and said in her thin singing voice—"Dear Richmond, I am so sorry. Was he glad you came?"

She was now sure that she had dreadfully misjudged Rich-

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mond. He had meant the land for Jude. She lay awake half the night, hardly able to wait until she could see him and ask his forgiveness, and now that he had come was shy and afraid with him. She waited until he had bathed and breakfasted, and then said desperately—"Richmond. The land. Jude told me." Her voice broke. "I'm so ashamed," she cried. "Oh, Richmond, forgive me."

He looked at her with a kindly mockery. "You were quite right, m'dear," he said. "I hadn't the least intention of giving it up to you and Jude when I told you about it."

She said unhappily, "You have the right to laugh at me."

His glance was sharp and contemptuous. "I'm not laughing," he said. "I'm telling you the truth."

Jael touched his arm. "It doesn't matter, does it?" she murmured. "I'm often stupid. Please forgive me."

He patted her hand, and kissed her with an absent kindliness. His thoughts were shut against Jael, even while he regretted that he had not talked to her when he first thought of John Trude's land. It had been unkind. He resolved to tell her carefully and honestly about Robert Marsh and his farm in Kent, and rehearsed in his mind all the advantages he would gain by studying under so admirable a teacher. He prepared to tell her them in such detail that she could not think she had been left out of his plans.

Nevertheless, he wrote to Robert Marsh and had that efficient man's answer before saying one word to her about it. He did not understand the impulse that drove him to secrecy. It irked him a little, too, and when he came to tell Jael what he wanted to do he spoke abruptly.

She said—"But Richmond, why go so far?"

"You question everything I do," he cried.

Her hands lifted in that familiar gesture of defence. She said sadly—"You tell me nothing."

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"I'm telling you about this."

Jael shook her head. "You've arranged it all," she said quietly. "I know that because you are so angry with me."

Her quickness angered him, and he said unkindly—"Must you pry everywhere? Is there nothing I can do for myself?"

In her bewildered pain—for she had had no thought of angering him—she tried instinctively to guard herself from him. "Everything you do is for yourself," she said.

He laughed. "You think so?"

She could not bear his laughter, and cried bitterly—"But I know it. You hide yourself from me. Plot and scheme in secret. As if I were your enemy."

"By God I think you are," he said.

She put her hands to her face where a flame burned under the delicate skin. "I am your wife," she said. "Fit to work for you, contrive and save for you. Fit to share your poverty and your bed. But not fit to share your thoughts, even when they most sharply concern me."

He seemed to withdraw himself in an aloof dislike. "You have a tongue like your father's," he said. "It knows no decency."

"Oh, go," Jael whispered. "Leave me alone—before I leave you. If you had but left me long ago—in my own world. I was happy there."

He laughed again. "Oh, I'll go," he said. "I'll go now. You'll not be troubled with me again, m'dear. This time pays all, I think."

He went, pushing past Jude, who had halted on the threshold in time to hear Jael's last bitter thrust.

He was still hot and angry as he flung his things into a bag, and ten minutes' furious walking down the moor road in the July sun cooled neither his wits nor his temper, but when he reached

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the corner that would hide Trudesthorp from him, he stopped. He had the strongest impulse to go back and comfort Jael. He thought—"She'll cry," and his heart misgave him. For a long moment he hesitated, and then went on. If he had not loved Jael he would not have been so hard with her nor found himself so disposed to hurt her.

Once, as his temper cooled, he laughed boyishly at himself. Even in the melodramatic suddenness of his departure he had reflected that the last south-bound train of the day would be due at the village within two hours. He had just left Trudesthorp for ever, and here he was going calmly down to Kent to learn how to look after Trudesthorp land. The absurd manner of his going made him quite cheerful. His spirits rose and he felt very young and light-hearted.

The clatter of hoofs on the road behind him brought the blood to his face. If it were Jael—— He whirled round. It was Jude, breathless and flushed. The boy slipped off his horse and said—

"I was sure I'd get you."

"Jael sent you?" Richmond said quickly.

Jude shook his head and saw a shadow sweep over Richmond's face as light is swept from a field by the sun's withdrawing. He said—"Jael is unhappy," and before Richmond could retort upon him, added in a wild rush of words—"It's no business of mine, but I love Jael. And you're so good to me, my dear."

Richmond interrupted gently. "I've never done anything for you in all my life. I wish I had."

"Do something now," the boy said eagerly. "Come back with me."

Richmond stiffened. He shook his head and cut short Jude's urgent speech. "I can't come," he said shortly. "At least, I'm not coming."

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"I've interfered," Jude said unhappily. "And done no good. You think me an officious ass."

Richmond smiled. "No," he said. "No. But tell Jael when you go back that I'm more of a fool than she thought. My dramatic gesture meant—just nothing. I'm going into Kent. She knows why and where."

"You're coming back again?"

"Of course. I'll stay five months and be home for Christmas. Tell her so."

He watched Jude mount reluctantly, and felt again the urgent impulse to turn back and comfort Jael. He had a curious sharp vision of her standing forlornly just where he had left her, her ears straining for the sound of steps and voices. She would think every step his and be so sorely disappointed.

He did not like the thought, but he liked less to go back. His pride stuck in his throat and he went on.

He reached Robert Marsh's farm in the late evening, having wired to announce his coming. The air felt heavy and soft after the sharp air of the moors, but the village, folded in the brown dusk, had a tranquil air. It gathered the fields round it with a placid intimate gesture, like a mother, quiet-eyed and comforting. And the long lane that lay between the last cottage in the village and Robert Marsh's large square house was a dim whispering alley shut in with high hedges that great trees overtopped and pressed down, and running over with a myriad heavy scents.

He stood in the cool low sitting-room, and when Buddy Marsh came into the room he knew that he had been expecting her from the moment he stepped over the threshold of the house. She was softer and rounder and rosier than his memory of her, all warm round curves like a plump little cat, and her eyes shone with mischievous pleasure. She told him, in a soft serious voice, that she had given up her work in town as soon as her

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father wrote that Richmond was coming. "I pretended that I was tired," she said breathlessly. "He was so glad to have me home. I didn't tell him I knew you." She laughed joyously. "I do know you, don't I, darling?"

Richmond said soberly—"I shan't tell him."

She cried—"But you're glad? You wanted me to be here? Oh, you must, or you wouldn't have come." She came nearer and lifted her mouth to be kissed. "I had begun to think you were never coming to me," she said softly.

Richmond shook his head. He looked what he felt, very young and very troubled.

"I can't make love to you in this house," he said, and added, "Besides, that's all over, my dear." He sought for words. "You always knew I loved my wife. I never pretended anything else."

She said—"Yes, I know. But you didn't mind that—before." Her face changed, subtly hardening. "And I didn't mind it either." She paused. "You wouldn't expect me to think about it—if you didn't, would you?"

He said gently—"Don't, Buddy," and felt a black shame and very helpless.

He thought she was going to cry, but she laughed instead, a gay serene laughter that stirred Richmond even in the bitterness of his shame and self-scorning.

"Very well," she said. "We'll be friends."

He looked at her with honest admiration. "You dear," he cried. She lifted a warning finger as Robert Marsh opened the door, and coming in, presented Richmond to his daughter, who for the rest of the evening played a comedy of formal courtesy with the most childlike zest in the world.

Alone in his room, Richmond thought of Jael, and hearing Buddy's voice on the stairs realized, with desperate honesty, that under all his good reasons for coming to this place had

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lurked the unspoken one that actually had brought him. Buddy was right: he had come because of her. He had wanted something of her—not to make love to her—his imagination shrank savagely from the thought. Perhaps he coveted her gaiety, her youth that nothing troubled or marred.

He thought—"I'll get away from here," and a youthful foolhardy pride rose in instant revolt. He would not go. He would stay and keep off the girl. "And that should be easy enough," he thought hotly, "if I've any decent instinct in me."

He fell asleep, his body curled round in utter weariness, so that if Jael had seen him she would have wanted to gather it up and comfort it against her own.

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CHAPTER III

RICHMOND began his day's work when grass and hedge-row were covered with a fragile sparkling web that the ascending greedy sun sucked up in the twinkling of an eye. He stepped into the warm dimness of the sheds and took his share of the milking. Afterwards he sat at a breakfast table crowded with dishes—cold ham, dishes of bacon and eggs, smoking mushrooms in their brown fragrant sauce, piles of yellow scones, very hot and dripping butter, and six or seven dishes of preserves—opposite Buddy's glowing face, its colour gloriously sun-deepened, and watched the pretty play she made for him with bobbed curls and short thick lashes. She was growing plumper on country fare, which troubled her mightily, but her pouting mouth was a richer crimson and she had a soft just-ripe air and eyes drowsy with well-being.

The harvesting was begun. Richmond, country-born and nurtured, had already a deal of vague unrelated knowledge of the kind he had come down to get, but he had a deal to learn. Robert Marsh, being a conscientious man and not given to taking money for no service at all, meant that he should learn it. At the end of hard days he set the young man to poring over books kept as carefully as a man of any other sort of business might have kept them. He talked to him, drawing lavishly upon the unrecorded wisdom that he carried in his head, questioned him about Trudesthorp, and proffered shrewd advice.

Richmond was profoundly interested in his work, for it was

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ever the Drew way to give body and soul to what they did at the moment. There had been Drews as black as John Trude, though none so spectacular in their villainy. The rest were fighters, quick with the fierce vexed soul of a violent and fanatical race, or craftsmen in one art or another—a rare aptitude in a family so bred and rooted in the moor, which breeds more readily thinkers and fighters than artists. And there was an undisciplined and venturesome temper in them all—fighters and craftsmen—and Richmond had his share of it.

He was grateful for Marsh's interest in him, but one hot and lowering evening fled out of the house to escape it. He walked across fields that the stubbled wheat made harsh and slippery, and climbed to the top of a little hill. A wide belt of trees ran down the farther slope and Richmond flung himself on the short grass that bordered it. No dew had fallen, and the parched earth felt warm to his hands.

Darkness, creeping over the far-flung fields, reached his little hill and like the stealthy sea flooded over it, and still he did not stir, or notice that fields and hills and folded villages were all awash in the tide of night.

He had begun by thinking of Jael. She had sent him no word since he left Trudesthorp, and he had turned over in his mind her last bitter gibe until he had not sense left to forget it or wit enough to forgive her.

He was sitting with his back against a tree that stood farther out into the field than its fellows, and his hand, passing idly over the ground, plucked and crushed a handful of leaves before he had the curiosity to hold one up and look closely at it. It was a violet leaf, and straining his eyes he could see that the wood was carpeted with their soft dark green, and instantly remembered Jael standing in the dusk of Weetwood with the year's first violets across her outstretched hand, so shy,

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so filled with the burning grace of early youth, untouched, unkissed, with eyes of faery.

It was a vision he could hardly bear, and he started to his feet. On its heels came another, less sharp, of Jael in the great barn, flushed with her labours as *garçon d'atelier*, putting up a hand to push the dark hair from her forehead. He put that away too, shutting his heart against the eager joyous child-wife of Richmond Drew who was to have been a great sculptor, and thought instead on the sculptor.

His boyhood in Switzerland and the solitary spaces of Nethermoor had bred him in habits of meditation, and he had learned easily such lessons as wild and uninhabited places of the earth will teach all men. They taught him a patience as steadfast as Nature's own, though able to break as violently, and a religion of an unquestioning and simple sort. He was too shy and wild of heart to pray as Jael did, but he had had a firm and half unconscious faith in some indwelling and friendly Spirit.

That faith had by the frightful accident of war been monstrously uprooted. There were men—he had met some—whose faith was strengthened by it, but Richmond was not one of such. Seeing so much pure and selfless devotion and daily untrumpeted heroism, he did not, as they did, thank God for it, but accused God violently for the suffering he saw so manfully endured. His sensitive youth and his worship of all loveliness helping, he fell headlong into the old folly of blaming God for the wickedness permitted by man.

The death of Paul in tragic unforgettable fashion shocked him so cruelly that himself did not know how deep the hurt had gone. When Paul died, the kindly God of Richmond's first faith died with him and John Trude reigned in his place —a John Trude who had come to seem the very crawling obscenity of life, blind, dark, greedy, mocking the dreams of men.

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Richmond distrusted even his own dreams of beauty. Paul's horrible death mocked them. John Trude mocked them. His mind, shuddering, pointed to the old man, and said—"He is your heart," and then could not endure that frightful thought and turned violently away. He was mortally afraid of this Trude-God, and sickened and revolted, and he grew afraid of death because death might be the door to a life as monstrously ridiculous as this one that stamped Paul into the mud and made men scream in pain as trapped beasts scream.

The clean sweet spaces of the moor might in time have restored him; and there had been less to fret him if he had not broken faith with Jael. An easier man might have thought less of so common a treachery, but Richmond had never been easy and was, moreover, fanatical about his wife. Into his love of her had been woven so many pure and burning dreams and hopes most radiant that it was grown a very part of him, and he felt shamed and wounded in himself by the pitiful folly that he had made a deceived wife of Jael and a common adulterer of Richmond Drew. It irked him savagely.

So sunk in thought he was now that he did not remark the slow change around him. First the trees stirred faintly as if the tardy wind hesitated to break the sullen calm. The clouds that overcast the sky, growing wraithlike and ragged, were rolled up from the west and fled before the wind that followed on their heels and uncovered the hidden stars.

The west wind is fierce and sweet at once, like young love, and when at last it blew Richmond's hair over his eyes and woke the trees behind him to ecstatic whispering, he straightened himself and drew a breath of sharp pleasure. He was still so young that a wind from the west or sight of stars flowing out over the sky could make the blood leap in his veins and his heart grow light and wild. He forgot the girding pressure of his thoughts and stretched his long body exultantly, content

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with his strength and his twenty-nine years. From which vanity he fell into a dissatisfaction with the use he had to make of his strength and youth. He felt loth to go back to Trudesthorp and there live like a farmer, tied to the earth. At the moment it seemed a barren life, and his fancy, running riot as any man's sometimes will, even the soberest of the kind, mocked him with the thought of wilder lands and a life that could stir all a man's courage and a young man's hot blood while Trudesthorp offered nothing better than grinding labour and a wife grown cold. Why should he live there until his joints stiffened and brain and eye grew dull? It would be better, while his blood ran quickly and his limbs were supple and strong, to get a bellyful of adventure and have it to dream on in his age—if he lived—and if he died, die at the top of life.

In a moment he would have been laughing at his folly and remembering Jael's kind love and joyous grace and his own ambition. But as he half turned to walk back to the house he came face to face with Buddy Marsh, walking silently on the soft springing grass, hatless, with wind-blown curls. She ran, laughing, over the short space between them and cried—"Did you hear me? I meant to startle you." She took his arm, and still laughing half ran and half danced down the hill and plunged with him into the fragrant darkness of a lane so narrow that it was no better than a footpath. Panting a little from their wild rush, she said—"Just a little walk," and walked soberly beside him.

Trees and high hedges, almost meeting overhead, shut out the wind, save for a wandering breeze that hardly stirred a leaf. In the warm close air Richmond's eyes grew heavy and his wits dazed. He breathed the sharp heady fragrance of meadowsweet; it rolled in stifling waves from the dark hedgerows. His mind, still fretted with a disturbing dream of which it remembered nothing except that it had been disturbing,

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wondered where the lane led and why Buddy was so silent. He looked at her and thought queerly that for all her youth and pliant charm she did not belong to the magical green fastness of this lane. She had no woodland elfin air nor eyes miraculous as stars, wide, dream-visited and radiantly shy. He spoke to her idly, and she stopped in the narrow path, and drawing his arms so that they folded round her, kissed him suddenly and hotly and said his name—not "Richmond"—she had never used that, but her own name for him.

She said softly—"Just once, Droodles, please, just once—kiss me. Just to show you haven't forgotten it all," and he, remembering all too burningly the soft pressure of her body and how desirable it had been and even now was, held her closer, and returning her kisses felt the desperate beat of the blood in her encircling arms and her breath quickening in her throat.

He drew back suddenly and said—"You—we mustn't do this sort of thing. That's all over, my dear, and you know it."

He felt ashamed and a fool, and when she cried angrily—"Oh, do I?"—and ran from him, stumbling in the darkness, he did not follow her, but stood there wondering if she had guessed how near he had been to taking her again and with what a shaken longing, restless and dissatisfied as he was, he desired even that rest and short oblivion she offered. . . .

When he reached the house it was in darkness. He bolted the front door and climbing softly to his room began to write to Jael. He was afraid for his lamp in the rushing draught and shut the windows, but all the time he wrote he heard the wind singing in the buffeted trees, so that its wild leaping music got into his head and he wrote quickly.

"Darling little love, have you forgiven me for making such an idiot of myself? I think you have, for you forgive me far too easily. I wish I could forgive myself. I wish I'd come back that day, as I half thought of doing. Were you crying,

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Jael? Oh, Blossoms, I hope you weren't. I can't bear to think of it now.

"I haven't always been unkind, Jael. I've comforted you sometimes, and tried—so clumsily—to mother you. Haven't I?

"My heart aches that you've had so little out of our marriage. Dear, forgive me. I try so hard to keep down my damnable temper. Indeed, indeed, I will try to be a good husband. I love you. And it makes my bad moods all the worse that I seem so often to make you afraid of me. It maddens me. I wish I'd been kind and good and tender all the time I was with you. I love you. Don't cry, dear.

"I will try and write to you very often and keep you from feeling lonely up there, wife of mine.

"Oh, my dear, my little dear love, I'd sell my soul now to hear your voice say—'It doesn't matter. I love you'—and see your eyes, so passionate and tender, shine most gloriously for me.

"You're not crying now, my dear? Don't cry."

He waited impatiently for Jael's answer, and as days passed and did not bring it he hovered between gusty rages and moods of bitter disappointment, and a dozen times was on the verge of rushing off to Trudesthorp to end his doubts. He thought he could bear anything better than this contemptuous silence. She cared so little that she could not even be civil to the lover who had laid before her all the mad tumult of shame and desire and love and hatred that filled his soul. He felt bitterly humiliated.

No juster than the rest of us he forgot entirely the weeks that Jael had often waited for his infrequent letters, but he remembered their wild quarrels since his return and the times when she had answered him with forked and bitter tongue.

He was angry and hurt and woefully surprised that he should

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have come upon an end to her love. And because he did after all love her more than anything else in the world, he was often humble and humbly unhappy in having lost it. He was sorry for Jael too, because he knew her better than to think she had come easily by her new indifference. Sometimes he thought she might be ill or very tired, and then only the strange chilling obstinacy that had got itself somehow into the depths of his warm heart kept him in Robert Marsh's house, doing his day's work, picking the older man's brains and indulging the dangerous friendliness of his daughter.

The farm lay so far from the village that letters were delivered there only once a day. One hot dusty evening, a fortnight after the sending of his letter, Richmond was suddenly sure that Jael had written. He saddled a horse and rode down to the village to ask at the office. So sure of it he was that he held out his hand, and said cheerfully—"May I have my letter?"

The old woman shook her head. "I ha'n't nothing now," she said slowly, and Richmond, reeling a little as if he had been dealt a frightful blow, flung himself out of the tiny room and rode off in a demented fury of haste. He neither saw the old woman trembling after him to the doorway nor heard her thin quavering voice as she called out that there had been a letter for him which Mr. Marsh had got less than an hour ago. She watched him disappear and the white dust settle slowly in the road again, and then wandered back into the dim recesses of her room.

"He've trodden on my patch of pot herbs," she said sadly, "and he didn't hear a word I said."

Her daughter, who cherished a soft passion for Richmond, said soothingly—"Maybe he was disappointed." She sighed. "It might have been a love letter he wanted."

"And that it oughtn't to be," the old woman said tartly.

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"He's married, and Robert Marsh's girl should think shame of herself to look after him the way they say she do."

Richmond slackened his pace before he reached the farm, and when he had taken the saddle off the trembling animal and rubbed her wet sides, he felt cool enough. He could not stay in the house, however, and he began walking rapidly, turning away from the fields that led to the wooded hill.

He was convinced now that Jael had utterly wearied of him, and he found a kind of dour satisfaction in the completeness of his loss. He was stripped and beaten and naked to the world, outcast by his love, a man without a home, and free. Free! A lawless delight in his freedom ran through his veins and he laughed with a wild gaiety. He thought—"I have nothing now, that started out with such full hands." He had been ambitious and his ambitions had broken in his hand. They had failed him. His wife had failed him.

He was torn with a sudden wild misery and stumbled as he walked.

His witless feet brought him round to the far end of the lane where he had walked with Buddy. He thought of her as he walked, choking and breathless, between dark hedgerows that drenched him with their poignant fragrance, and was not surprised when at last he emerged and was climbing the slope of the hill to see her standing between the trees. At sight of her the restless fury of his thoughts grew still. He came up to her and she, with one glance at him, clung to him and said—"Oh, I knew you'd come."

He held her for a long time, kissing her without tenderness, but with a passion that satisfied her. "I've wanted you," she whispered.

"Do you want me again?" he asked her unsteadily.

"Yes, oh yes, Droodles. . . ."

The touch of violet leaves cooling his hot hands. He laid

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his cheek against them. There had been another wood, where now was a small flitting ghost whose eyes, so childlike, kind and honest, were terrible to think on.

Richmond did not think of them.

He let Buddy go home alone, and lay for hours with his face buried in the crushed violet leaves and his body relaxed in a drowsiness from which he presently fell headlong into sleep.

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BOOK V

"It is a hard matter for a man to go down into the Valley of Humiliation."

—*Pilgrim's Progress.*

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CHAPTER I

DAVID stood up in the bath while Jael squeezed a spongeful of water over his head. He leaped and gasped, and when Jael wrapped a towel round the gleaming little body he almost strangled her with wet arms clasped round her neck.

He was wildly excited, because Richmond had sent him a magic lantern from the dim mysterious region beyond Blackacres. He had given a show to an embarrassingly talkative audience. Jael had behaved well enough, sitting properly in her place and applauding politely, but Theodocia had no sense of decency. She said—"Aw, my dear life, you'll burn your fingers," and "I do mind the time when I saw one of they things down to Plymouth. It was a main fine show, sure enough, and my master said there was a devil in en. You'm not a devil, li'l David, you'm a praper young man. I'd like fine to kiss you, my dear." David stamped with vexation.

"You can't *see* me, silly Doxie," he said furiously. "I'm behind the scenes."

"Aw, my dear life," Theodocia drawled, "and you sitting up on the table bevore my very eyes." She sat quiet until David announced that there would now be a poem, said and written by David Drew. Then she could no longer restrain her admiration. "Do you hear?" she cried to Jael. "He'm grown into a praper little scholard."

"I'll not say it to you if you don't keep quiet," David threatened hotly.

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"Go on, David," Jael said. Theodocia subsided, smoothing the black silk frock she had put on for the show. It had been her best frock for thirty years since she bought it "down to Launceston," and was now so tight across the chest that she could hardly breathe, but she felt bound to honour the occasion in some way.

David said slowly and carefully—

"Flowers aren't all the year round,
Ships don't sail all the time,
When the sun is shining it looks like a golden lake.
Daffodils are out at Spring and calves laugh all day
And it isn't very dark at half-past six
When I go to bed."

Theodocia said loudly—"Aw, my dear, do calves laugh?"

"Yes," David told her shortly, and she sighed. "Good Lord, du'ee think of that now," and catching sight of Jude who was shaking with laughter, cried angrily—"You take me for a praper vule, you do."

"Go on, David dear," Jael said again, but David shook his head and not all Theodocia's coaxing could get another word out of him. He shut his small mouth firmly, and scrambling off the table packed the magic lantern in its box, refusing even to glance at the discomfited old woman. His stoical silence lasted until he was ready for bed, and then he said indignantly—"Calves laugh with their legs."

"So they do," Jael said gently. "Why didn't you tell us the rest of the poem, David?"

"Were you main disappointed?" he asked, and chuckled with delight.

She nodded her head and he broke into a peal of laughter. "There wasn't any more," he cried. "I was just punishing her."

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Jael looked a little grave at that, so he patted her face softly and said—"I'll tell you a story instead, darling." He began breathlessly. "Once there was a spider. It went for a walk and met a caterpillar which wanted its breakfast and it ran after the spider but it was so fat that it burst. So the spider laughed and went home."

He knelt down abruptly and said his prayers, and as soon as they were over said eagerly—"I suppose you think that's not a very good story."

"I think it's very good," Jael said promptly.

He smiled complacently. "I think I'm getting rather good at them, don't you? Poems and things, I mean. Though, of course, I shan't bother with them when I grow up. I shall be too busy doing engineering." He glanced at her out of bright eyes. "I'm sorry about Jude," he murmured.

"Why?" Jael wondered.

"He really ought to have had a penny for helping me with the magic lantern. But I simply haven't got it to give him."

Jael said—"No use, David. You've had this week's penny."

"Oh, well," he said placidly, "give me my little friend."

Jael found the black rag doll that he so passionately cherished. He always took it to bed with him and hugged it all night to his warm body.

"You love him too, don't you, Jael?" he crooned, and held it up for her to kiss.

She kissed its worn and shiny face reluctantly.

"You do love him?" David insisted.

Jael lied as satisfactorily as she might.

"Well, but how *much* do you love him?" David asked earnestly. "Do you love him as much as you love me?"

"No," Jael said decidedly.

"Oh, try to," he urged her.

"I couldn't really, David," she said gravely.

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"Will you love him a quarter as much?" David begged. He gazed fondly at the shapeless wretch. "He *needs* love."

He tucked the thing in his arm and talked to it gently. "Did you enjoy the magic lantern, darling?"

"But he wasn't there," Jael said rashly.

David looked at her gravely. "Of course he was there. He goes everywhere with me. You can't see him because he makes himself invisible. Do you think I'd leave him lonely in bed all day?"

Jael, who knew that was just where the creature did spend the day, had nothing to say. She looked at David's crimson cheeks with apprehension. He was wide awake and his eyes were still starry with excitement.

She left him, but an hour later heard him laughing and talking to himself. She went in to remonstrate and found a David with cheeks aflame and hair standing out like a fine gold mist round his small head. He greeted her loudly. "There's been a cat in here," he said defiantly, "or else I'd have been asleep. It came through the door with its tail straight up in the air, and said, 'Oily, oily, oily,' in a cattish kind of voice."

"The door was shut," Jael said sternly.

"A black cat," David retorted, "can get in anywhere, even through a tight shut door. Didn't you know that?" His eyes were a burning blue, and he had a supreme confidence in their power over Jael. "I shall have a *black* stocking for Christmas," he said dreamily, "because it's the colour of night, and that's the most exciting. Is it far to Christmas, Jael?"

Jael sat down on his bed and said gently—"Will you go to sleep if I tell you a story?"

"Sure enough I will," he said at once.

She wondered what was the most soothing story in the world. David's hand slipped into hers and he sighed for happiness.

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Her girlish shoulders drooped a little wearily. Jael was very tired.

She had remembered now which was the most soothing story of all, and began in her small lilting voice. "This is the story of Mary mother," she said. "When Mary mother and Joseph came to the inn there was no room for them, and the man who kept the inn said—'Go into the barn for this night.' So they went. There were cows and sheep and other animals in the barn, but Mary mother was not afraid of them, and after a while Jesus was born. She'd brought some clothes for him and she wrapped them round him, and was so pleased to have a pretty child. And Joseph was very kind to her and helped her every way he could think."

"I expect that was how she got such a good child," David murmured. "Them both being so kind. Now tell about the kings."

"They came from the East," Jael said. "From a long way off. They knew that Mary mother was living under an especial bright star, and I expect that as they came they talked to each other about her, and wondered what sort of a palace she was living in. They were surprised when they saw the barn, but they stepped in and found Mary mother there, and she was so happy and the child so beautiful that they forgot how poor the place seemed, and brought out presents for Mary mother and the babe."

"And Joseph," David said sleepily.

"And Joseph. Yes, of course. Some for Joseph, too. And then they went away because they knew that Mary mother was tired. Joseph covered her up, and she fell asleep and the babe fell asleep. Everything in the barn slept warm and happy. Just like you're sleeping in your own bed."

David opened his eyes with an effort. "Did the kings know

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any spells?" he asked. "Theodocia knows one. What is a spell, Jael?"

"There were only a few wise men in the old days," Jael said, "and they had to teach all the other people. But the other people couldn't learn much and the wise men made up little rhymes to help them remember, and called them spells."

"I know a spell," he said.

"Do you, David?"

"It's a nice spell," he said, shy and drowsy. "Shall I tell you it before I go to sleep?"

Jael said—"Yes."

He made his mouth a curving sweetness and repeated softly—

"Speak not, whisper not,
Sweet thyme and bergamot."

"It's a spell for quietness in a garden," he said, and closed his eyes.

He was asleep three minutes later and Jael slipped quietly away.

Downstairs she found John Hender talking to Jude. The years of his hard service had taught the priest to expect little of his black moorland sheep, but had not dulled his ardent courage nor hardened his heart. Nor had they made less poignant and bitter the memory of Jude's christening. He had a deep and enduring love for Trude's son, and strove not to hate Trude because that might have seemed like shirking his own share in that night's work.

He was looking at Jude now with a whimsical affection. "You look rare and happy," he said.

The boy flushed. "For the first time in fifteen years," he said, "I can forget my cursed leg." He smiled. "I never took kindly to being crippled," he murmured. "A parson—saving

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your reverence, sir—once told me that God had chastened me in love. I was too angry even to laugh at the fool."

"Yet God must have had a hand in the affair," Hender said gently.

"I'd rather think," the boy said slowly, "that your God dwelt in some inaccessible heaven where the cries and prayers of His tormented creatures never come, than think He listens to them and lets them scream."

"He's not inaccessible," Hender said.

Jude swung round on him. "Then where was He when a little boy was being hunted by devils? A frantic crying little boy. Poor sport that for any devil, let alone for a God."

"You're talking wildly," the priest said soberly.

Jude spoke in swift atonement. "I should ask your pardon," he said.

Jael interrupted shyly. "Don't you love Christ, Jude?"

Jude looked at her with kind eyes. "You do, my dear," he said, and added—"My sister is the only person I've ever found who thinks of Christ as if He were a person she had seen and loved."

John Hender smiled. "I could have told that from the way she spoke of Him," he said. "If I had not known already. The people who love Christ are set apart. Like the soft, glorious Pleiades that keep together in the sky."

"I'm not soft and glorious," Jael said ruefully. "I have the shamefullest and meanest kind of tongue."

"Curb it, child."

Jael wore her puckish smile. "It would have been docked for a punishment if I'd lived in the Middle Ages," she answered.

"Once when I was crying over my leg," Jude said, "Jael heard me, and persuaded me to ask God to cure it." A glint of mockery came into his eyes. "Do you know, sir, I believed

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firmly that God would put it right? His indifference was a blow from which my faith never recovered."

"It must have been of poor growth," the priest retorted gently. "Did you want the whole course of Nature reversed to put your leg right? God couldn't stop the wheels of heaven for one small boy. The whole firmament would have been about our heads."

Jude's voice was thin and bitter. "He might have stopped my father torturing me," he said.

John Hender sighed and shortly went away. He kissed Jael and held Jude's hand at going. "Don't indulge your bitterness," he said softly. "To think bitter thoughts is to poison one's own soul. It kills all the little buds, you know, and then there's neither flowers nor fruit."

When the priest had gone, Jude turned to his sister, with a frown drawing down his fine brows. "John Trude sent for us while you were upstairs with David."

"For both of us?" Jael asked.

Jude smiled dimly. "I'm not afraid of him now," he remarked quaintly. "He said he'd be honoured to receive his children at their leisure. Courteous soul. We'd better go, my dear. He might be up to mischief."

They went, walking along the corridor to the great hall. Jude whispered mischievously—"I feel my old wound pricking me," and pushed at the heavy door.

John Trude was contemplating the fire from the cavernous depths of a brocaded chair. Jael had never seen him unshaven, and to-night he was as smooth as a courtier: she wondered whether he or Martha had practised on those hills and crevices of swart flesh. For some years his only wear had been bedgowns, of which he seemed to have a marvellous great store, and, indeed, no ordinary clothes would have looked anything but ridiculous upon that bulk of flesh and monstrous tree of a man.

He had wrapped himself to-night in a long red garment

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whose folds were clasped with cords round the desert of his belly, and over it put a dark cloak that would have fastened at the neck if his neck had not burst all bounds and spread like a hillock towards his shoulders. The cloak was fur-lined, and he had altogether a fantastic mediæval air and brooded upon the flames as if he quested salamanders there.

He greeted Jude with a gentle courtesy and took no notice at all of Jael, so that she slipped thankfully into the shadows beyond the firelight and shielded her face from the scorching logs.

"I thought," Trude said gravely, "that you should ha' your say about the land, since I cannot hope that you are satisfied."

He veiled his eyes in their bushy pits, but Jude had caught the fleeting malice.

"You can set your mind at rest," he said. "I am content."

Trude lifted one shoulder in a cataclysmic shrug. "Are you so?" he cried softly. "I should ha' had more to say if my father had given my land to a stranger."

Jude's voice was flat. "The land was yours," he said indifferently.

Trude thrust out his face. "You must ha' broken your spirit when you broke your ankle," he said deliberately. "You're a poor thing. I would ha' liked to breed a man and not a mandrake. Did you scream when they pulled you out of the ground, you witless root? I *ha'* heard you scream."

Jude stood up, with a gentle catlike movement. His face in the firelight was white and cruel. Jael looked at him and thought that if John Trude's soul had suddenly got free and issued from his mouth it would wear just such a smile and stare blankly and sway just so like a snake. She cried out.

Trude said—"I doubt England's filled with such as you. The best are dead and rotting, so that your sort can crawl like maggots in the sun. I saw them that went in 1914." His voice

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rang out suddenly as if he were moved beyond his evil mockery. "By God, they were men."

Jude drew back his head. "But for you," he said softly, "I should have been with them. But for you." He stood with his hands on his slim hips. "But for you. You gave me this leg that drags after me on the ground. You might have done worse to me. You might have given me your body." He laughed lightly. "I'd rather drag one leg than drag a tun of flesh."

He shook with silent mirth. "You're what Theodocia calls a main fine man and a praper devil. I should like to keep this pretty play going, but it bores me. The hook is through your jaw. Lord, what a fish. I'll go fishing for dolphins, and as I draw them up think every one a Trude, and say—'Ah ha, you're caught.' You gave away my land and the papers that give it me back are preparing now." His voice rose gaily. "Like the lady in another play, m'dear, you're bubbled, you're bubbled, oh, how you are troubled, bambourzled and bit."

Jael cried—"Oh, Jude, let's go now," and at the sound of her voice the devil of hate that tore his thin body went out of it and he began to tremble violently. Jael had her hands on his arm, when suddenly Trude reared in his chair with a strange bellowing cry, and threw a great log with a murderous swift rush.

Jude's arm flung the girl half across the hall, and himself swerved widely. The log flew past him and crashed against the panelling. Jude laughed. He kissed his hand to the maddened giant and swung himself across the hall, with Jael walking backwards beside him, her eyes fixed on Trude and her hands outstretched in fear.

They reached the corridor and the boy leaned against the wall. "I'm sick," he said. "I'm horribly sick." He was sobbing with fatigue. Jael heard Trude wailing in the hall

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behind them. He was calling her. Her knees shook and her bones were like wax.

She pulled herself together and turned to Jude. "I'll take you to Theodocia," she said. "Oh, poor Jude."

She was urging him along with soft desperate hands, but he stopped and said—"Can't you hear him? He sounds lost." He pushed her back towards the hall. "Go to him, Jael. I'll stay here for if you want me. Oh, go. I—I don't hate him any more. I never shall again."

Jael said—"I can't leave you. You're ill."

"I'm not ill. I'm just deathly sick. Sick of shame, my dear. Oh, go."

Her mouth felt dry and she could hardly walk, but when she did get back to the hall, Trude was sitting quietly in his chair. He looked up as she came and asked her mildly what she wanted.

Jael drew a deep breath and sat down because her legs would not support her any longer.

"I thought you wanted me," she said.

"Well, I did," he told her calmly. "But I don't want you now."

"You're all right, then."

He smiled kindly. "You can't kill an old tree with a puff of wind," said he, and added—"Stand up and let me look at you."

She came and stood beside him, resting one hand on his vast knee.

"You ha' a wearied look," he said at last. "Is aught wrong?"

Jael faltered. "I have been troubled."

He pushed her impatiently away. "You make me sick with talk of troubles," he told her angrily. "Are you starving or hunted or flying for your life? Has some enemy spitted your boy on a bloody skewer or dipped his head in boiling water or

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ripped up your pretty body? You should talk of troubles when the world comes about your ears and you ha' to fight for food like a savage and live like a savage in peril of your life from beasts and cold and hunger and men. Troubles. You ha' none. You're like all the rest of them that ha' made their bodies comfortable and built themselves palaces so that they can sit in the shelter and ha' agony in their souls." He stopped and drew a gasping breath. "I ha' talked myself into a drought," he said whimsically. "Call me my butler and be off."

Jael went unsteadily across the hall and opened the door that led to the kitchens. Martha had been squatting at the key-hole and fell headlong in, squeaking like a rabbit. Jael fled, and Trude's gusty laughter followed her down the corridor, while she groped her way towards a decent homely world, with Jude's hot fingers clutched round her cold wrist.

She coaxed Jude to lie on the couch in his room and got him a beaten egg in hot milk. Her self-control lasted until he had drunk it, and then she began to cry softly with her hand against her eyes. "I wish Richmond would come," she said. "I thought he would have come a month ago when I wrote to him. It doesn't make me happier to remember that it would be worse to starve or see David starve. I want him, Jude."

If Richmond, who was at the moment half-way up the long road that climbs to Trudesthorp and Nethermoor, had heard that naive cry, he would have been sorry for his tardy coming.

He had no good reason for leaving Robert Marsh at the end of September after arranging to stay until Christmas. The farmer had been none too pleased to make what he called a poor, mean, and uncomfortable ending, but Richmond was smilingly obstinate. He said—"I have to get home." He did not explain that he had suddenly become impatient to see Jael, and desire and impatience growing with every added day, he at last gave way to them and went off.

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He did not warn Jael, because he wanted to take her unawares before she had time to arrange the manner of her greeting. She might be angered by his silence, or chilled and shy. He did not much care. He wanted to see her, and as he strode up the winding moor road, thought of the boy who had come to Trudesthorp, hurrying along the very same road in haste to meet his first young love. The boy had come from the other side of the moor, and Richmond had the quaint thought that if he hurried now he might meet his younger self turning in at the self-same door. He lengthened his stride. The way before him lessened and his heart was racing as the boy's heart raced, and his mouth had happy lines about it. A new moon hung palely in the crimson spindrift from the west. He smiled and nodded to it like a fool or a very young lover, and when he reached the great gates looked back to smile at it again.

He crossed the lawn and came through the walled garden to the door of their own hall, and opening it stepped in softly. Within, the hall was all a dim, warm light, and he stood a moment trying to quiet his heart's mad beating.

The door of Jael's sitting-room opened, and Jael, pausing on the threshold, saw him there. He for one moment looked at her and lost himself in a queer maze of love and wonder. Then ran forward and took her to him, holding her so wildly that he did not feel her lying heavy and inert against his arm until his hold relaxed and she, with one shuddering sigh, slipped fainting through his arms.

He lifted her up and had but laid her on a couch when she stirred and looked at him strangely, and then with a familiar joy.

"Oh," she said, "you always come when I want you," and turned her face into the warmth of his arm.

"I'm sorry I startled you," he said softly.

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She raised her head to look at him.

"Why are you here now? Are you going back?"

He said—"No."

"Have you learned everything?" she asked absurdly. "Is it the end of your time there?"

He shook his head. "I should have stayed until December," he said. She looked puzzled, and he told her gently—"You don't have to worry about it. I've learned enough and I wanted to come home."

She smiled and would have gone to the kitchen then to get a meal for him, but he kept her on the couch. "I fed in the village," he lied. "At 'The Ship,'" and took her two hands between his. She was shaking from head to foot. "Not with cold," she told him. "For happiness." But her hands and arms were cold to his touch, and he could not get her warm or stop the trembling of her slight body.

"You ought to have a warm bath and go to bed," he said suddenly, "and what is more, I'm going to give you one."

She flushed crimson and said—"Oh no, Richmond," but he carried her upstairs and dropped her on a chair in the bathroom.

"You move," he threatened, and when, coming back with a bath sheet and her night things, he found her trying unsteadily to walk across the room, he said—"I'll *beat* you, Jael."

He draped the towel round the boiler to warm it, looking at her with a smile that made her feel like a very weak small kitten in a warm drowsy place. "I'd make a good mother," he murmured.

He knelt and took the pins out of her hair and brushed it gently into two plaits. "They're almost to your knees," he said softly, and kissed each one as he pinned it again round her head. Then he stood back and regarded her with love and mischief struggling for mastery in his eyes. He touched her cheeks that were now flaming and bent to whisper—"Why is it all

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right for me to see you in your nightgown and so terrible for me to put you into it?"

She would not answer and he stroked her averted face, and said gravely—"I'd almost forgotten to warm the gown. How useful boilers are," and spread it out on the shelf above the useful boiler. "I like your nightgowns," he said. "They make you look like a Greek nymph. A quite *good* nymph, Jael. A votary of the moon, I think—very white and slim and innocent."

"They're very plain," Jael murmured.

"That's what makes them so adorable. You won't ever take to wearing pink muslin, will you, darling? I couldn't bear to see through you or get mixed up in ribbons." He looked at her with a boyish teasing smile, and drawing her to her feet held her in one arm while the other fumbled at the collar of her frock.

He lifted her into the bath and was swift and very gentle with her. She put up her mouth to kiss him with a grave childish adoration that tore at his heart, so that his hands shook a little as he wrapped the warm bath-sheet round her and rubbed her slender limbs and comforted her with light fleeting touches.

"Now you're dry and all kissed," he said unsteadily, "there's only your nightgown." He gave it to her and gathered up her scattered garments, and with garments and Jael both in his arms hurried along the shadowy corridor to her room.

He left her there and she lay in the firelit room, half awake and half asleep and filled with a happiness so sharp that it was almost unbearable, until Richmond came and blew the candles out and took her in his arms where she fell instantly asleep.

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CHAPTER II

THE regeneration of Trudesthorp was visibly begun. Richmond and Jude planned carefully and for long ahead. The desolation was too complete for swift recovery, even if their inexperience had not so urgently counselled prudence and delay.

Fencing and ditching began at once, and some of the lower fields were tackled. The grounds round the house were put in order, slowly enough. Both lawns were cut and rolled, but Richmond said they would have to be returfed afterwards. The flagstones of the terraces were repaired, and where the carved stone balustrade had suffered from neglect and frost and the fury of moor storms it was carefully restored by one of John Drew's old workmen.

From the gardens were wheeled monstrous piles of weeds and rubbish, and the bonfires that followed filled David's days with ecstatic joy. He rushed wildly from back to front of the house, getting in everyone's way as only a small boy can, and so sure of his usefulness that even Theodocia did not snub him. Then Jael gave him some bulbs of his own to plant, whereupon he became very workmanlike and sober and troubled the world a little less. He wore often an odd expectant air, as though he stood on tiptoe for something that would happen at any moment, to-day, to-morrow, perhaps, round the next corner, over the little hill. With a half mischievous, half wistful smile, he waited—not impatient, but always a little watchful, so that the least unfamiliar noise would send him scampering

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to the window or the bend of the path to see—what? Jael did not know, and David, smiling his wise child's smile, would parry her diffident, infrequent questions with a soft guile.

The park was cleared of undergrowth, and Janet Trude's garden prepared for a more radiant spring than it had known since Janet planted its bulbs and seeds so lovingly that they came up and sang together like the morning stars.

Richmond went to Leeds and brought back two of the small, rollicking babies John Drew had made in stone, and a copy of his own blithe *Faun*. He set them up in the walled garden over night, and in the morning was rewarded by Jael's delight. The babies were set on the small grass plot, but the faun lurked behind a rose bush, where his wild laughing eyes mocked the birds that were not more riotous with life than he.

Kitchen gardens, that under Theodocia's care had maintained a sparse and ordered decency, were restocked, and the great courtyard itself was cleaned of moss and lichen, so that Theodocia said it was like the courts of heaven. "Aw, my dear life," she said, "there should be angels walking round en, and not that toad of the pit." She meant Martha, who was standing blinking in the autumn sunlight in the doorway of her own kitchens. "Jezebel," Theodocia said spitefully. "God should ha' thought twice bevore He made such as her to darken the sun."

Richmond forgot his intolerant dislike of Bellber and rode over to ask advice. The older man gave it readily, sold him some rare fine stock at a fair price and found him a man to take charge. He said awkwardly—"You've a hard job. You mun look to us for what we can do." Richmond thanked him and returned to his own place with a new liking for the Squire of Starcross warming his heart.

John Trude was mildly interested by the changes, and one evening stood in the doorway of the great hall and called

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Richmond. He had a bunch of flowers crushed in his hand and held them out for Richmond's inspection, a forlorn fragment in the vasty hollow of his palm.

"Your son gave me these," he said gravely. "I doubt I've killed 'un. I've a hand like the Sahara, all dryness and heat."

"Can you see a difference in the place?" Richmond asked cheerfully.

Trude grimaced horribly. "You'll ha' me in decent swaddling clothes before you're done," he said, and added slyly—"Are ye going to turn me out soon, son-in-law?"

"I can't turn you out of your own house," Richmond said boldly, "but if I could I'd think shame to let it go to ruin as you are letting it."

"It could be put right," Trude said reflectively. "There's nought wrong but dust and cobwebs."

"You've made stables and kennels of the finest rooms in the place," Richmond retorted.

"Well, put un right," Trude said. "I'll let ye." His smile mocked the young man's hesitation. "Do you grudge the cost?" he asked softly. "I ha' given you more than that."

Richmond said—"If I have the rooms made decent, will you keep them so?"

"I'll not ha' Martha turned out," Trude observed mildly.

"The house is yours," Richmond shouted, "and she's your servant. Don't be a fool. I can't turn her out." He added with less violence—"I can have the place cleaned and send a man to dust it once a week."

Trude said jeeringly—"The testy housewife he is," but he dragged the angry young man into the hall and said soberly—"I ha' some liking for the place." He looked round at Nathaniel Drew's frieze. "I ha' left it to your boy," he said, and added brutally—"You can set the door ajar to sweeten it when I'm gone."

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Richmond thought—"It will take a rare sweetening," but refrained from uttering the graceless thought, and went.

After a few weeks he began work again in his studio, sparing three or four hours in the morning, working swiftly and with a new ease. His hand had remembered its cunning.

The thing he made was evil, but the clay lived. Vibrant and supple, its surface had the infinite complexity of the living flesh. The light was reflected from its unnumbered and infinitesimal facets, so that it moved and breathed and drew in sunlight and air.

It was John Trude and yet not Trude, but a strong furious thing that struggled in John Trude's riven bulk of flesh. It could not see, it could not speak, but it *felt* with its sunken wrinkled eyepits and with its vast curving mouth, as if eyes and mouth and all its senses were blind greedy feelers sucking up the life that fed its monstrous strength.

From his restless imagination sprang now a strange diversity of forms. He made the first sketches for that bronze of his called *The Gate.* It is the figure of a soldier beaten to his knees by wounds, lips twisting from the acrid sting of poisoned air and the bitter salt of blood. He is foredone with pain and weakness, but his hands are steady on his rifle, and the eyes in his grim young face are wild and hot with fever. They are youthful and strangely exalted, and laughing at the bloody pain of victory. Richmond called this *Paul,* but it was called *The Gate* when it came to be shown.

He began the exquisite dreaming *Death* that was not finished until the years had taught him the tender irony which lies hidden in its strange mingling of passion and austerity.

Richmond would not let Jael take her old place in his studio, but he refused her diffident offer with a gentleness that pleased her more than his refusal hurt. She thought he was content, and contented herself very gladly.

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He was content, letting his work and Trudesthorp swallow him up, until the day when a letter from Buddy Marsh startled him out of his absorption. She had written before, and he had answered her very cheerfully, but this letter was unlike her others. He read it with something very near anger.

She wrote that she was coming to see him. "Not to your house, of course, but to that inn in the village where there are often people staying. You know, Droodles, you did promise me that I should come there some day. And I want to see you. Something is dreadfully wrong."

He walked down to the village on the next evening, feeling troubled and a little desperate, as if he saw this secret of his own creation moving and twisting under Jael's unconscious hands. "The Ship" was a comfortable stone-built inn and all summer was crowded with visitors from the West Riding, but now, in early November, was deserted. He went in and asked for "Miss Marsh, my cousin," thinking to himself that the boldest way was always the safest, and the chances of village talk reaching Trudesthorp remote and few.

Buddy came and said nervously—"Don't let's talk here, Droodles. Let's go out. They'll think I'm going to your house with you."

She laughed a little, and when they were walking through the fields along the beckside, put her hand through his arm and made her voice very soft and small. "You're not angry with me, Droodles?"

He looked at her sidewise. "No, my dear," he said, "but I'd rather you'd asked me to come and see you. If I had to see you."

Her mouth quivered at that. "Is it dull for you to have me?"

He felt a sudden warm kindness for her and told her quickly—"No."

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She was thinner and wore a plaintive air. He asked her what was wrong, but she shook her head. "I'll tell you soon," she murmured. "Just let me be a little glad."

They had come out into the narrow lane that led to Weetwood, and as they walked between its low stone walls her spirits rose and she talked gay nonsense and asked him where he danced now and who danced with him.

"No one," he told her, with mock sadness.

"We'll dance together again soon?" she begged. "Promise, Droodles."

He promised, and now they were on the edge of the wood itself, and the path wound upward, narrow and stony and riven with gnarled roots.

"This is a dear wood," she cried, and asked its name.

He told her—"Weetwood," and they walked in silence until the trees closed round them and there was no sound but the far-off sound of waters falling and the scurry of tiny secret feet through undergrowth and fern. The mild airs of autumn hung yet about the valley, and in the heart of the wood it was warm and fragrant.

He led her from the path to a slope covered thickly with pine needles, and said—"Now, Buddy, what is it? Why have you come?"

She would not answer, and he urged her with all the gentleness he could command. "You must tell me, my dear," he said. "I'll help you in any way."

She shook her head again, and when he grew a little sharp and urgent began suddenly to cry. "There's nothing wrong," she got out at last.

Richmond said queerly—"Nothing?" and she repeated the word faintly after him.

"I meant to pretend that there was something wrong," she said miserably.

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"What you wrote was just a lie?"

His voice frightened her and her tears fell fast.

"There's nothing," she said. "Nothing wrong at all, except that I shall die if you do not love me."

He was coldly angry, and turning his shoulder on her stared through the trees with furious eyes.

She was crying uncontrollably now, and after a while her grief worried him and he spoke gently. "Don't cry," he said. "It doesn't matter."

She tried to dry her tears with a small damp handkerchief, and Richmond saw that her pretty face was flushed and swollen: she stood in front of him like a desolate child. He looked at her and then took her suddenly in his arms. He kissed her, stroking her hot cheeks and saying softly—"There, you silly thing. Why do you cry and spoil your jolly little face?"

She clung to him. "You were so angry."

He was patting and fondling her as if she had indeed been a sorrowful child. "I'm not angry now," he murmured. "See how I'm loving you."

Her warm mouth found his and she pressed close and quivering against him. Desire swept over him suddenly, and his eyes, no longer gentle, sought hers.

"You don't love me, Droodles," she whispered. "You only pretend it when I ask you."

"Don't I?" he asked her. "Are you sure I don't? Buddy dear, are you sure I don't? Look up. . . ."

The village was already in darkness when they walked through it to "The Ship," where one light shone through the unshuttered windows. He kissed her at the door of the inn and strode back to Trudesthorp. A fresh wind from the moors could not cool him and his footsteps dragged on the rough road. . . .

Jael was sitting before the fire with her hair hanging in

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two plaits on each side of her face, so that she looked like an Italian madonna and a little wistful.

"Did you go walking?" she asked him. "Where did you go?"

He said—"Weetwood," and watched the swift smile turn her sober air to elfin glamour.

"I would have come with you," she said, "if you had asked me."

She came and sat on the arm of his chair and began to smooth his hair and caress the hollows of his temples with a light pressure of her fingers.

"I like to come there with you," she said idly. "Why did you go alone?"

He felt sick, and the touch of her fingers was intolerable. He pulled her hand down and held it while he thought of his promise to see Buddy again. "Soon," she had urged him.

"Yes, soon."

"I went back to work in London so that it would be easy," she had said.

He remembered her hands that clung and her pleading voice.

Jael slipped on to his knee, a rare concession. Her head was below his chin and her hands rested in one of his. He held her for a long time while she watched the firelight through drowsy half-closed eyes, and thought dreamily of Theodocia's butter and David's shabby coat and the flowers for Elizabeth Hender and Richmond's kindness and her secure amazing happiness.

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CHAPTER III

RICHMOND watched Jael playing with David. They were playing a wild game of David's invention, and Jael was as riotous as her small son and as gravely chagrined at her failures.

He heard David say—"You won that time, mother."

"No, I didn't, David darling," Jael said ruefully. "I never win. I'm the completest little stupid."

"You're not," David said earnestly, and a moment later Jael's voice rose in protest.

"Oh, David, you're cheating. You touched my ball with your foot."

David said softly—"I just wanted you to win. You *ought* to win sometimes, Jael."

Richmond swooped down upon them and kissed Jael's laughing eyes and called her "You dear blessed infant." He picked David up and squeezed the breath out of his small body before he set him down again on the floor, where he shook himself and smiled at Richmond. David laughed more often than he smiled. He laughed for joy and smiled for love. His eyes grew oddly soft and luminous and his lashes drooped a little over them—it was the most engaging and heart-stirring of smiles. He loved Richmond with a kind of dizzy reverence that was much more troublesome to him when he thought about it than his warmer love of Jael. He was half afraid of Richmond, and so passionately anxious for his approval that he defied and disobeyed an angry Richmond

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just to hide the frightful blow his pride got when Richmond turned on him in wrath. Sometimes he wandered about the rooms and the garden, not exactly looking for Richmond, but keeping up a tremulous fiction that Richmond was looking for him and would be wonderfully excited when he appeared. He felt a subtle bond between himself and Richmond in that they both were men, and whether he guessed that his father had only the lightest interest in him no one could have fathomed. Not even himself.

He turned to Jael now, and settling himself on her knee asked her for the only song she sang to him.

She folded her hands across her breast in the unconscious brooding gesture that became her best and sang about the Old Woman who went up in a basket. The words were old, but the tune Jael fitted to them was a crooning cadence that came from some dim happy memory.

"There was an old woman went up in a basket,
Twenty times as high as the moon,
And where she was going I couldn't but ask it,
For in her hand she carried a broom."

Jael's voice sank to a soft murmuring like a tiny peaceful brook in summer, and rose again as the Old Woman soared off on her strange errand.

"'Old woman, old woman, old woman,' said I,
'Whither, oh, whither away so high?'
'To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky,'
And I shall come back again by and by.'"

David had buried his face in her neck, from which soft hidy hole his voice came muffled.

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"Will I ever see her, Jael?"

"You might," Jael said.

"Will she take me with her?"

"And that I don't know," Jael said softly, "but you'd have to come back again."

He sat up and laughed, and slipping off her knee danced until his head nodded. Then Jael carried him off to bed, and when she came back found that Richmond had gone to his studio. He could not be working—the twilight was long gone—nor even sketching, for the place had no light but lamps. Jael wished she could go in search of him, but she did not dare to follow him into the studio because he had plainly so little wish to see her there.

It was near midnight when he came back, very pale and tired, and even then he could not rest, but wandered about the room. He was growing restless again, Jael thought, and her heart misgave her a little.

At last she said—"You're tired, Richmond." He stood still and looked at her.

"Do you know what you mean to me these days?" he asked queerly.

She shook her head.

He told her softly—"Sleep."

She felt a sharp pain at her heart, that hurt and yet was sweet, and asked him pitifully—"Is that all I mean?"

"Sleep in your arms," he said, and came suddenly and knelt beside her chair. She gathered him against herself with a wide tender gesture.

He loosened the plaits of her hair so that it fell round him, and said—"Sing now, Jael. Sing to your other little boy." Thin and high and sweet the thread of sound rose in the quiet room: his throat swelled with tears and he was so very happy that he did not care to speak.

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"To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky——" Jael's voice faltered and died.

"Go on," he whispered.

"I can't," she said. "My heart is choking my throat."

He did not lift his face. "Your dear hair," he murmured. . . .

That night Jael lay awake for a long time. Tears welled up in her eyes from she knew not what grief or happiness. She lay very still because Richmond slept as if he were wearied out, but once her hand touched him and still asleep he turned and flung an arm across her breast.

Richmond was never angry now or hostile and unkind. His tongue slipped often enough into a bitterness that had not belonged to the boy Richmond, but Jael curbed her tongue and made her eyes kind, and so there were no quarrels or hurting things said between them. She thought gravely that Richmond had mastered and was driving out the devil that had been fighting for his soul, and she lost all fear of it and him.

But there was the barrier that she could not cross. She knew is as surely as if Richmond had said—"Thus far and no farther in my thoughts, my dear." He had withdrawn himself from her, and taken from her, too, the joyous friendliness and lovingkindness of their marriage. She thought about it as little as she could, and when it was too sharply plain told herself soberly that all marriages must come to some such pass, even so glorious a marriage as hers. She tried to laugh at the girl Jael, and stifled the sorrow she felt that the girl should live on when the boy had died or gone away whose kind honest eyes had given her all the thoughts and dreams of his clear mind and loving heart.

She was often gloriously happy, and when she forgot or was not reminded of the lurking barrier she was the most joyous thing in the whole moorland. If Richmond had reconciled

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himself to his secret thoughts, if even he had thrust them and Buddy with them out of his life, Jael would no doubt have had to go down into the Valley of Humiliation, because that all travellers must, but she might have found it a place of pleasant airs, as did Christian's gentle wife, and worn ever "that herb called *heart's ease*" in her bosom.

He could do neither, and so the barrier between them hardened until he had no content and Jael bruised her tender hands against it and was sometimes sick at heart, though that much Richmond did not know and could not have guessed.

He did hear Jael's unspoken pleading. She was always now asking him for a reassurance he could not give and for something that he had taken from her. He felt her pleading like silent tears, as if she were crying secretly in a room of his own mind. He did not now hate her for it or think of it as something that he ought to endure. He understood it and even loved her for it. But he had never been able to stand the sight of tears. They angered him. So that even now, although he would have liked well to comfort her, he felt only a half pitying resentment when turning suddenly, he met her eyes, wide and burning, and saw the questioning spirit in them hide itself swiftly out of sight.

He went several times to London, making one pretext or another to get away. His liking for Buddy was sincere and deepened by his gratitude for the serene and unexacting affection she gave him. It was not, after all, in Richmond's nature to love lightly, and his love of the sweet-tempered comfortable girl—so untroubled by any pride of soul or wilful intellect—had made its own place in his life. He might be—he was now far enough from the first ardour of his passion for her, but he loved her the more compassionately for that, and had allowed affection to root itself just as deeply in his heart that to tear it out would have cost an effort—and a pang.

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It might be supposed—on first thinking—that it was all natural enough, and found to happen, seeing that faithfulness to one woman is not the common way of a man. But indeed there is always something unnatural about a love that comes between a man and his wife when the wife is lover and beloved. In this sense Richmond's love for Buddy was as unnatural as any affair of the kind ever was, flourished as bravely as any, and had as little chance of ultimate survival.

Richmond was pushing himself away from her. She was a little aware of it already, and it hurt and angered her. Once she said jeeringly—"I suppose you think I'm a bad girl?"

"I know you are," he told her coolly.

She was pierced through her complacence and retorted on him sharply.

"Not so bad and wicked as you are. I'm not *married*, after all."

He fell into a long silence in which he seemed to forget her altogether, and emerging, said with a half dreamy bitterness, "My wife would break her heart."

"Not over me," said Buddy. . . .

He gave up making occasions to go to London, but when he had to go found the thought of seeing her again pleasurable enough. A little he was driven by the need to prove to himself that there was no reason why he should not make love to two women—both adore his wife and indulge the decent kindly affection he felt for Buddy, and enjoy her readiness to return it. It could not hurt Jael, because she did not know of it.

But chiefly he went to see Buddy because he still wanted to, and because his thoughts were sometimes woven with odd stabbing memories of her cherubic and provocative curves. The roots were in his heart, even though they might now be a little dry and withering because they had no deepness of earth. And Buddy was desirable enough, as almost any other man

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would have agreed, asked for nothing that he did not want to give, and poured out for him eagerly the subtle flattery of her admiration and respect.

Throughout all that winter and the spring and summer of another year he continued to see her often enough, though all the time he drew a little way from her and a little again. Then, in the early days of September, his grandfather died in Switzerland, and Richmond, going over to clear up his affairs, came back by way of London and Buddy.

They had arranged to dance, but Richmond was tired, and for the most part they sat and talked through a horrid clamour made by the most expensive mulattoes in London.

They talked at first idly, and Richmond could not afterwards have said what prompted the abrupt startling gesture that tore down the decent curtain between their poor passion and the emmpty end to which it was now come.

She had for a moment or two watched him furtively, and now said—"You are bored."

"I'm tired," Richmond said. "I've been travelling for three days, you know."

"I don't mean that. I mean that you're bored with me. It was all good fun in Canterbury, wasn't it, but it's getting monotonous now."

"That's not true, my dear," he said.

She laughed lightly, flicking her fingers in his face. "Don't be stupid. You haven't wanted me much lately. Do you think I can't see it, Droodles?"

Richmond said slowly—"If I hadn't wanted you, I should have stopped the whole thing."

Her face grew serious. "Then you *have*—liked me a little," she said, "just a little, since you were—at home again?"

He showed her a troubled and boyish face

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"Do you suppose," he said, "I'd have gone on lying to my wife in order to get away with you if I hadn't—liked you?"

She sat for a long while staring at the dancers. Her voice when she spoke at last was indifferent and hard.

"How you regret it all now, don't you, Droodles?"

He lied with all the earnestness he could muster. He did not know he was lying when he began his little speech, but he knew before he had finished and was shamed into something more like honesty.

"For my wife's sake, I wish it hadn't happened," he said steadily. "It's been worth all but that." He looked at her and added humbly—"For me, my dear. It's not been fair to you."

"You needn't worry about me," Buddy said. "I'm content. I've had an experience. If I never have another I'll not have died without once being—happy."

She paused and seemed struggling for self-expression.

"You know, Droodles," she said at last, "I've no sort of brain. I'm not *stupid*. I just mean that I don't think things out. But I *have* been thinking about this a little—since I began to wonder how much longer it would last." She paused again, and he had the odd sense that she was trying to teach her mind a new responsiveness and finding the attempt painful and confusing. He could not help her. He had reached the lees of the cup and found them bitter.

She said—"An ordinary good woman," stopped, and began again more readily. "Your wife and I must look at things so differently. She'd think I'm somehow degraded because I've been your mistress. I suppose she was brought up to think that. So was I." She paused, and lost the drift of her thought.

Richmond said—"I've cheated you out of something, Buddy: perhaps you'll hate me for it some day."

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She was not listening to him. "I've liked you," she said. "I'll be sad when you've gone. But there's time for a lot of exciting things to happen to me yet."

"I've done you no good," he said painfully.

She stared at him in real bewilderment. "Don't be silly, Droodles," she murmured. Her thoughts were still turned and struggling to some end that had nothing to do with him.

"Men have always enjoyed themselves as they pleased," she said. "They've been free. Why shouldn't I be free? Why should I deny myself pleasures that no man would deny himself? I'm not doing anyone any harm. I'm not ashamed of myself. I'm no worse and no different from hundreds of girls. I'm not bad or unprincipled." She frowned. "*She*—your wife, Droodles—would feel indecent and degraded if she let another man make love to her."

"Jael couldn't do it," Richmond said, and could have bitten out his tongue but that he saw Buddy had no ears for any interruption.

"I didn't feel degraded," she said. "I don't now. Why should I? We've—liked each other."

Richmond was so numb and tired in body that he found even the effort of sitting upright a weariness. He had been as numbly tired many times in the trenches, and then as now his brain had strangely cleared. Thoughts crowded upon him so vividly that he began to lose the sense of duration. It seemed only yesterday that he had stood with Jael in Weetwood and felt his boy's heart burdened with love. The fragrance of crushed violets was in his nostrils and the echo of a boy's ardent resolve in his ears now, as he sat here.

The temptation that had come to the boy rose up as clearly; the people, thoughts, and feelings that had belonged to it stood up before him in their living reality. He saw very clearly, too, the chance that had been given him along with the temp-

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tation, and he saw how nothing he had got by yielding had been worth the loss of the boy's single-minded honesty of purpose and pure bright joy in a love such as is not possible to every mother's son.

He looked at his companion with the eyes of that boy and grew hot with grief and shame—grief for her and shame for himself.

There had never been anything in it at all that had been worth while. It had been a lie, and God or Fate, or whatever might be up there, watchful and just, always punished liars. He began to pray silently and fervently—in an agony of mind—that the punishment should fall on him and not on Jael or this other, and grew cold with fear in the hot room.

He thought swiftly—"Buddy must never guess what I feel. I've done her enough wrong without that."

She had been watching his troubled face with a smile and now jumped to her feet. "Let's dance this one," she cried. "To-night we'll dance and to-morrow we'll go out to the forest, because I'd like to remember you that way. You're always happier and gayer in woods. I've noticed it. You sniff the air and your voice gets warm and happy. We'll go just once more, Droodles, before you give me up, and we'll pretend we're free—and frightfully romantic."

Her voice faltered, but her eyes did not, for she had a certain homespun instinctive decency that the fumbling gestures of her mind a little belied, and she was very biddable; Richmond was stirred and more than a little shamed by it.

He spoke out of a rush of emotion. "You've been very good to me, my dear. I couldn't give you up, you know. Do you think I don't love your generosity—and you?"

"I think you do—to-night," Buddy said wisely.

So they danced, and the next day went out to the forest—and were as free and romantic as might be, and Buddy forgot

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her unwonted gravity. Perhaps she had remembered that she was very young and that all the exciting things in the world were still possible to Buddy Marsh. . . .

The earth held them very lightly now—the withered roots. A little tug and they would be out, and yet not altogether out, because of such a growth some hidden part is always left—dead perhaps, but still there—so that the soil remembers it though the barren tree is gone.

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BOOK VI

"Laurel is green for a season, and love is
sweet for a day;
But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel
outlives not May.
Sleep, shall we sleep after all? for the world
is not sweet in the end;
For the old faiths loosen and fall, the new
years ruin and rend."

—*Hymn to Proserpine.*

"But oh, my man, the house is fallen
That none can build again."

A. E. HOUSMAN—*Last Poems.*

"Some also have wished that the next way to their Father's house were here, that they might be troubled no more with either hills or mountains to go over; but the way is the way, and there is an end."—*Pilgrim's Progress.*

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CHAPTER I

JAEL sat thinking while David ate his supper. It was the evening she expected Richmond home from Switzerland, and her thoughts were strange enough.

In the morning she had been busy and happy, gathering September roses from the terrace bushes to fill the rooms with their fragrance against his coming. Once she caught sight of Jude riding across the lower fields, and her heart warmed with love for Richmond who had wrought so fortunate a change in her brother's life. She thought she had not been half grateful enough for all he had done, and ran upstairs to his room with the childish thought of doing something for him quickly. She laid out some clothes for Theodocia to brush, and emptying the contents of a drawer out on the floor, began to arrange and fold the piles of clothing with absurdly careful hands. An envelope and torn fragments of a letter fell out from among them, and she looked idly at the writing on the envelope and wondered whose it was. The words—"Dearest Droodles"—on one of the fragments caught her eye next: she stared at them for a moment and then with a swift fierce gesture gathered up envelope and fragments together and flying down the stairs thrust them into the kitchen fire. She watched them flicker and fall into ashes. Her cheeks burned and she would not acknowledge her sudden shameful impulse to spread the fragments out and read them. She did not know what had prompted the impulse. It had leaped into her head from nowhere and brought with it a strange prick of fear and an uncomfortable sense of mystery.

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She thought—and smiled a little—"Mr. Temptation must have been about."

Walking away, she met the new young servant-maid who had just come from a village at the other side of Blackacres. Theodocia had been treating her with bitter-tongued suspicion, and it was with some thought of cheering the downcast young creature that Jael stopped and said—"Did Theodocia tell you that my husband is coming home to-night? You haven't seen him yet, of course."

The girl spoke shyly in the soft broad speech of the dales. "I ha' seen un once," she said, "last November like, when he came to fetch his cousin from 'The Ship.' I was seeing my sister who be maid there, and she said—'That be Mr. Richmond Drew from Trudesthorp.'"

"My husband's cousin?" Jael repeated vaguely.

The girl lifted her clear eyes. "Maybe the lady would be your own cousin," she murmured.

Jael snatched at her wits. "You must remember to say ma'am," she said gently, "or Theodocia will not be pleased with you."

The girl blushed and smiled. "I mun try," she said softly.

Jael walked slowly away, and all day long her mind ground over the girl's innocent speech. Curiously, she never once thought that the girl might have been wrong. She took the tale for truth and could make little enough of it, except that Richmond had wished her not to know of this cousin and her mysterious visit. And that she did not understand, but instinctively knew that she had come upon some new edge of the thing that had troubled Richmond ever since he left the Air Force and shut his mind against her. A dull indefinite foreboding gathered down upon her heart as the day drew on.

She put David to bed, and while he chattered to her, listened half to him and half to her nagging thoughts.

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"Shall I be married when I'm grown up?" David wondered.

"Oh yes," Jael murmured absently.

"Do you know any men who aren't married?"

"Lots."

"Why aren't they?" he demanded.

"Oh, I expect they just didn't want to be."

David thought about that for a while and then said—"I shall want to be married."

Jael asked—"Why?"

"To have somebody with me," he told her.

Jael looked at him out of the corner of her eye. "Won't I do, David?" she murmured.

"Oh yes," David said cheerfully, "so long as you live. But when you die and *he* dies, I ought to have *someone* with me."

Jael agreed gravely and thought, with an odd tremor, that David never spoke of Richmond except by that breathless adoring pronoun. And Richmond had so idle a love for his son.

David returned to his bread-and-milk and Jael sat brooding, her head propped on her hands. She was weaving a romance round Richmond's unknown cousin. Thoughts and strange pictures flitted through her head.

Richmond kissing the hand of a tall and glorious creature. He said—"Yes, I love you: I could love you passionately." She held out her arms, but Richmond stepped back, his face—his dear face—Jael choked a little—*white and haggard. "There's Jael, you see. She's so fond of me."*

Jael's thoughts took a sudden leap. She saw herself sending Richmond to his unknown love. *"She's so clever and beautiful, and I have always been a little stupid. I shan't cry for you, dear Richmond. I shall only be glad that you once loved me—so glad—so glad."*

At this point Jael gave a dreadful little moaning cry,

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David's spoon clattered into his bowl and his face flushed crimson. He slipped off his chair and rushed across the room.

"Oh Jael," he said, "what is it? Oh Jael, don't cry, oh don't cry." Tears ran down his distraught little face and he patted her hands and face and neck with his warm hands.

Jael pulled herself together sharply: she kissed him and laughed a little, and with laughter still hovering in the corners of her mouth saw him scramble back into his chair, mightily relieved.

He had forgotten the incident altogether when she was tucking him up in bed. He was tugging at a tooth: Jael touched it and found it perfectly sound and fast in his head.

"You mustn't pull that out, 'dorable David."

"Theodocia said," David told her gravely, "that if I pulled out that loose tooth last Saturday and wrapped it up and put it under my pillow, it would turn to sixpence in the night." He eyed her sternly. "And it did, Jael. Theodocia knows a lot of magic, I can tell you."

"That was a loose tooth," Jael observed. "The magic won't work for a fast one. Why do you want sixpence?"

David sighed. "I need a pound a week to keep me going," he murmured.

Jael roused herself to deal properly with his greed. "Oh, David," she said soberly, "and such a lot of little children haven't even enough bread to eat."

"Well, why haven't they?" he demanded.

"Because their mothers haven't enough money to buy it for them. The children cry for bread and the poor mothers haven't got it to give them."

He lay silent for a moment, with grave considering eyes.

"Well," he said at last, "what I was thinking I'd do with that sixpence if I got it was to buy buns for them. You know that little lane behind the post office. There's a lot of poor

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children there. Once I was eating a bun with jam in when I was going down there, and I came to a *very* sad little boy, and luckily I hadn't got to the jam, so I gave it to him." He looked at Jael with wide ingenuous eyes. "I was going to buy buns and give them to those poor children, Jael," he said earnestly.

She bent down and kissed him. "Sleep now, little David," she said.

"I feel rather queer," he murmured. "I ate too much tea." He closed his eyes and opened them again suddenly. "That cat came and looked at me last night," he remarked.

"What cat?" Jael asked.

David waved his hand. "A cat that comes," he said, frowning.

Jael said—"You dream that cat, darling."

"I do not," David retorted crossly. "It comes and looks at me. If it touches me I shall be dead. Anthony Bellber says a black cat is a devil and can kill with its eyes."

Jael wished that Anthony Bellber's folk-lore did not fit so well with David's vivid imagination. She laughed softly, told him Anthony was a foolish little boy, and left him.

Waiting for Richmond in a garden made marvellous by an opulent harvest moon, she made a childishly solemn resolve to ask him for the whole truth and to be very brave. Now that she had stumbled on so much more of the mystery, he would surely tell her it all and not be angry at her questions. "I won't cry," she whispered. "I'll make it as easy for him as I can. He's been so good. I *must* help him." She should have glowed with pride of her nobility, but she was in reality very cold and desolate. Her heart sank.

Suddenly she smiled, a hovering elfin smile, at the radiant vision of Richmond listening to her faltering words in clear-eyed amaze. She never thought that he might tell her lies. He would tell her truth, but the truth might after all not hurt.

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He might say—"Silly, silly Jael, there's nothing: I'll just tell you," and then sweep aside the barrier in one marvellous gesture of divine and easeful love.

A gentle host of memories rushed to assure her that he would do just that. She stretched out her arms in the glamorous dusk. "Dear Richmond," she said aloud, "dear husband."

His manner when he came was a new assurance. He said —"I had the most idiotic fear I'd not find you when I got here, Jael. I wanted to run all the way from London."

Jael's laughter was muffled in his arm. "What would you do if I ran away?" she asked, and lifted a flushed mirthful face.

"Run after you," he said promptly. "Run like hell, Jael."

He kissed her with swift passion. "Don't ever go," he said queerly.

The phrases she had carefully prepared dropped clean out of thought. She forgot everything, the strange cousin, her doubts, and her romantic vision of Jael sacrificed and very noble. She said—"I couldn't, Richmond," and fled on shy swift feet to hasten Theodocia's preparations.

While she was gone, Richmond, in his room changing, heard David cry out. It was a hoarse and terrific cry that startled Richmond horribly. He strode across the landing and opened the door of David's bedroom in one wild rush. The light fell on a tumbled bed and a terrified child. David's face was crimson and his eyes blazed wide. Richmond picked him up and found that his small body was burning hot and wet with the sweat of fear. His sleeping suit clung to him and he was trembling wildly.

Richmond said—"What is it, darling?"

David gasped. "The room," he said. "The room was full of night."

Richmond nursed him until his heart ceased to thump like

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a mill race and his breath came quietly again. He hid his face on Richmond's shoulder and managed the ghost of a laugh.

"An angel has been sitting on my chest," he murmured. "He said—'David, you've been bad. You'll have to learn to be better. I shall stay here, and if you don't grow better I shall jog up and down.' "

Richmond said gravely—"I expect you had a bad dream."

David curled up in his arms with a smile of pure joy. "It was a good dream," he said, "because you came at the end of it."

A new and rather solemn feeling of responsibility came to Richmond. He held David, a soft round burden, in his arms, and the child seemed to be slipping into his very body. With a stab of wonder Richmond felt David as if the child were himself. "He is me," David's father thought. "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." He remembered queerly a breakfast time when he had said idly—"I'm tired of porridge," and David, looking up from his own bowl, wide-eyed and grave, said quietly—"Men often feel like that." He had thought it amusing: he saw it now as oddly pitiful and kissed David in a swift remorse for that unheeded gesture of comradeship.

David was drowsy now and Richmond laid him down and began to straighten out the bed. David said unhopefully—"I suppose I couldn't stay in your lap until I'm asleep."

"Well, you can," Richmond said, and gathering him up again, wrapped a blanket round the little body, and settled himself on the edge of David's bed. David lay still in a dizzy surprise. After a while the thought crossed his head that Richmond would get tired of sitting there in silence. He opened his eyes and said hurriedly—"I think the rich should serve the poor, don't you? There's an awful lot of poor children in the village. Once I was going down that lane, you know, by the post office, and I came to such a poor boy.

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He was crying. Luckily I hadn't got to the jam, so I gave him my bun. I guess he liked it. Don't you think the rich ought to serve the poor?"

"Certainly," Richmond said.

"There's only one rich person left in the world," David said thoughtfully. "That's Mrs. Bellber. She's awfully rich. I wish she'd give some of her money to the poor people round here." He paused and looked up at Richmond. "I think the poor ought to have the best, don't you? Instead of which they have the worst."

Richmond wondered vaguely where David had come by his troubling thoughts, and how Jael would have dealt with them. He said at last—"When you're grown up you must see what you can do to help."

"Well, of course, I've got to be an engineer," David said hastily.

Richmond smiled. "You could do both," he suggested.

"All right," David murmured. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go and make a lot of money at engineering, and I'll send it to you to give to the poor people."

"And now go to sleep," Richmond said softly.

David turned his face into Richmond's arm and went to sleep with all possible haste, lest Richmond should grow tired of holding him and the heaven-sent hour be spoiled.

But Richmond waited until David slept and then made him comfortable in his bed. He did not hurry away, but stayed looking down at the rounded curve of brow and cheek and the long dark lashes on the delicate skin. "I haven't done you any harm, little son," he said. "I'm glad of that." He thought that if he could do nothing else, he could at least see that this small dreaming thing were not cheated of any good. "I'll make him *better*," he thought passionately. "Stronger and cleverer and more understanding," and then wondered boy-

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ishly what he had done to deserve such gifts as Jael and David.

He felt the same tremulous wonder when he looked at Jael, lying half asleep in his arms. All that was tender and protective in his love surged up and overwhelmed every desire but an aching compassion. She looked very childish and small to-night and he thought she was troubled.

"Are you happy, Jael?" he asked gently.

She turned her face aside. "I would be happy," she said, and faltered.

He bent to see her eyes. She cried softly—"Oh, Richmond, suppose I had been gone when you came back. Would you have minded very much?"

He smiled at her. "I should have been heartbroken."

She surprised him by lifting her hands to cover her face. "You don't mean that, Richmond," she said. "Say it as if you meant it."

He bent over her, amazed and gentle. "What's the matter, Jael?" he asked her. "Why, my little sweetheart, what is it? Have I hurt you?"

She was not crying, but she spoke with a soft desperate earnestness. "No," she said. "Oh, no, it's not that."

He drew her closer. "Then what is it, dear love?"

She said—"You've changed, Richmond. Everything has changed. I've thought—just lately—that you didn't really care to be here."

He said gravely—"I don't understand."

"I used to think"—her voice faltered again. "You were away so many years. I thought that when you came back you'd say—'Thank God,' and slip into the empty place and everything would be forgotten and as it was before." She paused.

He said in a low voice—"An' wasn't it?"

She shook her head. "No. No, Richmond. Somehow,

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you *didn't* come. You—looked at the empty place and went away again. Oh, I can't explain."

"It doesn't matter, Jael," he said gently.

She cried—"Oh I'm not scolding you. It must be my fault. I'm stupid in talking. I can't say the things I feel. But, Richmond, I have loved you. And if there's anything"—she paused—"oh, *anything*, Richmond, that has made you unhappy since you came home, and you have not told me—tell me now." She was holding him desperately. "I could bear anything but not to know. Anything at all. Richmond, dear Richmond, if I've ever done anything for you, been anything you liked, I beg you to tell me the truth. Tell me what is hurting you—hurting me. Richmond, oh I can't make you tell me. But I entreat you." Her voice failed.

She felt his slim body shaking in her arms. He said —"There isn't anything. Jael darling, there's nothing to hurt you. Never think it, never think it again."

Her strength left her, she felt weak and tired, and drawing him closer, fell into a light and troubled sleep.

In the morning, remembering his words, she was a little comforted and a little sad. "I think you are a fool, my child," she told herself. "Moon-crazy and wild."

There was a letter for Richmond. Jael laid it beside his plate, and saw, with a sharp-drawn breath, that it was written by the writer of that torn letter to "Dearest Droodles." Half-thinking, she took it and carried it out to Richmond in the garden, and half-watching saw his eyes flicker queerly and his mouth shut hard. He put the letter in his pocket and walked away.

Jael went about her work all day in a heedless abstraction. Her mind, for all that she was innocent and loving, had the strange subtlety that belonged to the mind of a Trude. It had, too, a silent stealthy trick of appearing to forget or to be

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stupidly bewildered, while all the time below the surface its steady tireless activity pursued a lost thought or puzzled out some mystery, which, when it had discovered it would deliver up, full-grown like Minerva, for Jael's startled wits to grasp.

She was half aware of this quality of her mind, but she was scarcely aware with what a consuming eagerness it was now grinding over phrases and incidents half-noted, in a ruthless determination to get at the truth behind Richmond's compassionate lies. She did not even know that Richmond had lied, but her mind knew, and would not be further cheated.

In the evening Richmond went out across the moor. He came home very late, and finding Jael gone to bed, flung himself without undressing on the bed in his own room. He was wakened by the touch of Jael's hands, and opening his eyes, saw her kneeling beside him in the darkness. He was too unhappy to remember his right part, and hid his face in her breast. She stroked the dark head in a soft passion of tenderness, and said so many loving foolish things that the daylight Jael would have blushed to remember them.

He could say nothing, but "Oh Jael, Jael," and hold her closer.

She trembled. She knew now that there was that in Richmond's heart which she could not comfort. She was afraid, too. But her hands were kind and she made her voice low and steady. "Will you go properly to bed if I leave you, Richmond?" For all her will, her voice shook. "I am so tired."

He promised, and she went back to her room and fell asleep.

She woke with a wild start and heard her mind say, as if a voice spoke in her ear, "The truth is in the letter, Jael."

She sat up, wide awake and shaking. . . .

Richmond slept like a tired boy, his arm crooked round his head. She stood on the threshold of his room. The polished

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boards were cold under her bare feet and her eyes were wide and blazing. She did not try to walk softly, and she set the candle where its light would fall across his face. "If he wakes," she thought wildly, "I shall never know, because he will not tell me, but I shan't have been mean—and a thief." So she dragged at the coat flung carelessly over a chair, with a deliberate roughness that sent the chair against the wall. Richmond stirred, while Jael stood with her hands clutched in the coat, and thought—"If he sees what I've done, he'll be shocked into telling me the truth."

He did not wake and she found the letter and went away with it.

In her room she read it, sitting on the edge of her bed. She grew cold and deathly sick. Her hand shook so that much of the letter became a meaningless chaos, but some phrases leaped at her like the thrust of spears against her bowed breast.

"It's almost over now, my dear, and don't think I'm not fully aware it would have been over months ago if I hadn't kept you up to it.

"You were very good to me that first night, Droodles. I shall not forget the kindness and gentleness you had for me.

"I never minded that you loved your wife. After all, you were honest with me. You didn't tell me the usual lies about your wife looking down on you, as Sadie's first did, and then she found out that the poor thing adored him and was heart-broken. But you're much cleverer than I am and I don't understand you altogether. You've been too serious of late, as if you were using me to help you forget something. I didn't like that, Droodles. I won't be used. I won't let anyone make use of me.

"I did make you happy sometimes? And you gave me things I shall not soon forget. I shall remember you in the little wood called Weetwood, where I cried and you comforted

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me and loved me. Oh, Droodles, you did want me then."

The letter slipped to the floor. Jael was now so deathly cold that her whole body trembled violently. She pressed her hands over her heart and felt it leaping like a mad thing against her breast. She stood up, and swayed, and clung to the post of the bed.

She thought that she had always known this, ever since Richmond, at Canterbury, neither wrote nor came to her. "I knew," she said. "I knew."

But if she had known, why was she now reeling and faint as from a deadly shock? She stood in a frightful desolation, and felt pain like a wind rushing round her shrinking body. She must have been for a few moments a little mad. She flung her head back with a gasping cry. Her fingers twisted round the plaits of her hair. She was blind and senseless and deafened by the desperate thudding of her blood through her limbs. Her tortured voice repeated foolishly—"It's Richmond. It's Richmond. Richmond did this to me." And once she flung up her arms with a terrible moaning cry—"Oh I'm old. I'm old."

Tears, flooding from her wide darkened eyes, fell on her clutching hands. The straining body relaxed. She was crying dreadfully, but she was crying, and that, though she was torn and shaken by it, was more kindly than her rigid tearless agony.

She began to pray softly. "Dear God, don't let me be mean about this. I mustn't be mean. Don't let me, God."

She swept aside with childish singleness of mind, the idea that Richmond had tired of the unknown girl, because she thought—"He could not have done this to me if he had not loved her most marvellously."

Her mouth trembled again at this desolating thought, and she grew dully aware of the wind that came lightly through

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the window and wrapped her thin gown round her. She slipped into bed and lay there, very straight and still, staring at the shoulder of Blackacres that lay sullen under the paling sky.

She was planning, slowly and painfully, what she would do, and going over it in her mind again and again like a child afraid of forgetting a lesson.

First I must get up early, and call David and dress him. Then I must go and see Theodocia about breakfast. Then we'll have breakfast and I'll talk to Richmond about the flowers round the upper lawn. After breakfast I'll speak to Rosemary, poor child, and tell her what she must do this morning. And then I'll tell Richmond I must talk to him. I'll show him the letter and say I'm sorry I stole it, but he must not be angry, because I could not bear not to know. Then I'll say—"We must arrange things, so that you can be free of me, Richmond."

Her thoughts slipped into chaos again, and she spoke with an odd bewildered little cry. "No, I couldn't say that. Not to Richmond. I—oh, I couldn't, you know."

She checked herself and whispered—"You mustn't cry again. You must go to sleep now, so that you'll not be too tired to remember everything."

She closed her eyes, but could not sleep. Long after dawn she was still repeating in a toneless murmur her careful childish plan.

At last her deathly cold and some strange homing instinct drove her to the refuge she would have sought in any trouble.

Richmond woke when she laid an icy hand on his shoulder. He looked at her drowsily. She said—"I'm so cold, Richmond."

"Did you come to get warm?" he asked sleepily.

He shivered at the touch of her trembling body. "You're ice cold," he said. "What have you been doing, little love?"

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He gathered her up and tried to warm her against his own body, comforting her with hands and voice. Her dreadful trembling ceased and she lay still and languid.

"Why, there are tears in your eyes," he said softly. "What is it, Blossoms?"

"It's nothing," she said, "nothing."

He touched them very gently.

"My eyes," she whispered, "kiss my eyes, as you do."

He did that and smoothed back her hair.

"Hold my face in your hands," she said, "and kiss my mouth—just softly, Richmond."

He laid upon it the softest touch.

She said—"Now rest your head upon my breast."

"You should be resting upon mine," he murmured.

"Please, Richmond," she entreated him, and folded her arms round him.

"I have wished for you to be here," she said, "when you were away."

He felt the strange quickening of her heart and raised himself to look at her. "Dear Blossoms," he said. "You've been lying awake. You look so tired. Just stay here and I'll bring us both some tea."

He would have gone, but she, poor fool, saw her few moments slipping from her and cried—"Stay just a little, Richmond. Only just a little."

He turned his head again and bent over her with a smile that had almost shaken from her the desolate cry that rose to her lips.

"Can't you spare me for a minute?" he said quaintly. "I'll come back, Blossoms."

He was gone.

When he brought the tea she was in David's room. She took the cup and thanked him gravely, and laughed with him

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at David's breathless story of the angel sent by God Almighty to sit on a small boy's chest.

She kept to her plan until she was standing with the letter crumpled in the hand held behind her back. Then her careful phrases eluded her. She was trying so desperately for calm that her voice sounded cold.

"Did you like taking your mistress to Weetwood?" she said.

Richmond stood quite still. His face betrayed no flicker of emotion. He looked at her and spoke quietly.

"What do you mean, Jael?"

She said calmly—"You know, I think." She held out the letter. "It's yours." Her voice broke and she cried out—"Oh Richmond."

Still he did not move and she fought for self-control. "I—I don't want to be mean or unkind about things, Richmond. I feel rather sick. There's something so—so ridiculous about a deceived wife, don't you think?" Her face twisted like a hurt child's and she cried out again. "Oh how could you, Richmond? How could you?"

At that he strode towards her.

"Don't, Jael," he said. "My darling, don't."

She retreated with her hands held out to keep him away, crying—"No, no. I don't want you."

He halted, and she found a new steadiness. "We must think things out." She looked at him. "You were with her in London—just now?"

Richmond said—"Yes."

"And you—came to me the next night."

She closed her eyes and swayed a little.

He said painfully—"I didn't know you'd be so hurt, Jael."

Her hand went to her throat. She said in a high clear voice—"I think I'm hurt to death."

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There was a silence and then, with some dim stir of memory, she said quietly—"We must arrange things, you know. We can get free, can't we?"

Richmond cried bitterly—"Don't you love me then, Jael?"

She gazed uncomprehending upon his distorted face and seeing that he was wrung dreadfully by some sorrow forgot to wonder whether it was for her or for his other love and ran to him, crying—"Oh, never mind, Richmond, never mind, darling."

They held to each other with a desperate pitiful passion, as if by the mere touch of hands and bodies they could heal the wounds they were dealing one another. He kissed her cold mouth and closed eyes, and she cried softly—"Don't mind, don't mind," until at last she could bear it no longer and drew herself away.

"You must help me," she said unsteadily. "I'll soon understand. I'm not very quick about lots of things, but I'm quick where you are concerned." Her voice shook. "I expect you think I might have been a little quicker about this. But I —I *couldn't* have guessed this, could I?"

He said—"Oh Jael," but she held her hands against him and cried—"If you'll explain just a little, Richmond."

He thought she wanted to hear the whole story, and he told it to her, with no sound from her except when she cried softly —"For three years, Richmond?" He even tried haltingly to tell her of the dragging restless futility and deathly boredom of his life at Canterbury, and she frowned a little over that and asked—"Why didn't you tell me to come down to you?"

He said jerkily—"I didn't think you'd care to come, Jael. There was nothing to come for. It was very dull. I said—'She went to please herself. She'd come back if she wanted to.'"

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She said quietly—"You mean that you didn't want me. If you had, you'd have asked me to come back to you and —and amuse you."

He spoke with an effort. "I'm afraid I didn't much care whether you came or not." He saw her wince and cried—"Ah, don't be hurt, Jael. It's not easy to explain. I know I might have asked you. But I just—didn't feel like bothering. We'd all got so unutterably lazy and bored."

"You were bored with me," she said, and thought over that for a little. Her face burned and she asked—so softly that he could only hear her—"Is she—beautiful?"

His throat contracted with pity. "Not really," he said. "Not nearly so beautiful as you." He looked away from her. "But she was young, and serene. I think it was her youth and gaiety that first attracted me."

She cried out at that. "I'm not so *very* old, Richmond."

"Oh, I know, my dear, I know," he said. His own voice broke. "If you weren't such a child, I—I might not have minded it so dreadfully myself."

She did not understand that, and her thoughts took a swift turn.

"When you were demobilized," she said slowly, "you wired that you would be—delayed a week. Was she the—delay?"

He nodded. The pain of it sickened her so that she ran blindly against the edge of the sword. "I expect you've missed her terribly. Why didn't you go away with her, Richmond?"

Richmond flung up his arms. "Go away with her! God bless my soul, what next? I didn't care for her in *that* way. I didn't want to live with her. Don't be silly, my dear."

The fabric of Jael's romantic supposition came about her ears with a deafening roar. She stared stupidly at Richmond, and said at last childishly—"Then why did you do it?"

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He laughed. "Because I'm that sort of man, Jael. I'm a seducer and an adulterer."

"Oh, no," she cried. "*No,* Richmond. Don't laugh at me. I'm trying not to be stupid. It's just that you—you seemed to be so happy to come back to me."

"I was," he said. "I was absolutely happy. I wasn't pretending."

Jael shook her head, still a little deafened by the crash. "And all the time you were planning to have your mistress as well," she said dully.

"No. No, I wasn't, Jael. It just happened like that. It was her father's farm I went to in July." He paused, and added flatly—"She was there."

Jael cried hotly—"Oh why did you go? You needn't have done that, Richmond." She wrung her hands. "But if you wanted her so——"

"I didn't," he said impatiently. "I wished fifty times afterwards that I hadn't gone. I thought I was able to meet the situation. I—I wasn't, and that's all there is to it. But I didn't go there to get my mistress. And I'll be damned if I'll let you say it, Jael."

"Then why did you go?"

"To learn farming."

"There were other farms."

He was silent, and she said desperately—"If you had let it end when you left the Air Force——"

Richmond shrugged. "What difference could that have made, my dear?" He stifled a wild desire to laugh: the room, Jael, himself, all were fantastically unreal. He hardly saw, hardly heard. "The mischief was already done. And I never meant you to know. What did it matter so long as you didn't know? And what difference could having her a few times more or less make—then? Nothing I could have done

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would have made it better or worse. Now would it?"

Her mouth lost its soft curve. "You could have given her up when you came to me," she said.

"Yes. Yes, of course I could. And I did mean to, Jael." He frowned, fumbling awkwardly among his thoughts.

"I didn't think it was any worse to have her in Cranbrook or London than to have her in Canterbury." He spoke gently. "It's no use getting sentimental about it, Jael."

Her bitterness startled him, and the strange dragging of her voice. "Don't you think it hurts worse to think of you living here, telling me lies so that you could go to her, and creeping between her bed and mine? Can't you see what you've done?"

He looked at her face, from which a searing thought had wiped all childish softness. "I can see that now," he said, and stammered a little. "I mean—I can see that you would feel that way about it. But I didn't think about it like that at the time, Jael."

"You didn't think of anything," Jael said, "except just to get what you wanted."

"I dare say you're right," he answered hardly.

She cried out queerly. "Oh, let me not be mean," she said, "let me not be mean and hard. Make me understand, Richmond."

"I can't," he said quietly. "I'll do anything, tell you anything you want to know. But I can't help you to understand. I don't think human beings *can* do much for each other in that way."

"They can be—kind—to each other," Jael said.

He smiled a little. "I haven't been kind to you, have I? Do you hate me very much, Jael?"

She gave him a direct glance. "I rather resent you," she said slowly. "You've made me feel very worthless, you know."

"Hardly that."

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She said quietly—"Why not?"

"You are what you always were," he answered. "You're not responsible for my—folly."

She spoke in a low voice. "I'm the poorest of things, Richmond. I'm the deceived wife. Jokes are made about me, and songs sung of me. I'm mocked and held for the laughter of fools."

He was wrung with a helpless pity.

"She must have been very charming," Jael murmured.

"She was content to take me as I was," Richmond said harshly. "She didn't like me for what I had done, or what I could do, or anything about me, but just for what I was."

"Didn't I?"

"You expected much more," he said, saw her eyes and cried —"There you see, my dear. I only hurt you if I try to make you understand."

Jael shook her head again. "Were you very happy, Richmond?"

"Happy enough, my dear." He paused, and said with an odd youthful hesitation—"I had my bad times, of course, when I remembered how grieved you'd be if you knew."

Jael, wincing, said softly—"They weren't bad enough to make you give her up."

"I didn't have to," he told her steadily. "If you'd come to me and said—'Choose between us'—I shouldn't have hesitated for a moment. But it didn't happen like that."

Her mouth twisted. "You took good care that it shouldn't, didn't you?"

"I dare say I did," Richmond answered quietly. "I didn't have to face it in that way, you see."

The pitiful weariness of her small face struck him with a fresh pang. "I didn't ever love her, as you and I know love, Jael." He cried—"Oh believe me, Blossoms."

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She came swiftly and held his hands down by his sides while she kissed his mouth, but drew back when he would have taken her in his arms.

"I do believe you," she said softly. "But I don't understand. I thought—last night—oh, a dreadful night, Richmond—that it was quite simple. That I had just to let you go. I don't understand it now." She smiled quaintly. "I'm so stupid. If I don't get it clear in my head, my mind will go on worrying about it for ever." Her voice broke. "I wish I hadn't asked you—when you came home—to tell me the truth. What a fool you must have thought me."

He said in a low voice—"You weren't the fool, Jael."

She cried dreadfully—"I don't understand how you could do it to me. I don't understand. I ought to have meant more to you." He stood helplessly while she fought for self-control, with mouth that trembled and torn shaken body. "Was it really worth while, to break me—for a little love like this one?"

He said gravely—"It was never worth while," and could hardly bear the childish cry—"Then why did you let it happen to me, Richmond?"

"It seemed worth while at the time," he said desperately. "Believe me, Jael, I never meant it to touch you. I never meant you to know. Besides—I didn't think it would break you like this, even if you did find out."

"You never thought of me at all," she cried, and covered her face in a sudden blind humiliation, not accusing him, seeing nothing but her own shame.

"I did, Jael. I did. But I thought that what you didn't know couldn't hurt you. I didn't mean to make you unhappy, Jael."

She said—"No, I know you didn't. It's rather dreadful to me that you didn't mean it. It's cruel." Her voice broke again. "Oh, Richmond, you to be so cruel to me."

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His heart ached for her. "I was a fool, Jael, and mean with it. But not cruel. I didn't deliberately try to hurt you."

"It *is* cruel to think so little about me that you meant nothing when you ran the risk of hurting me like this."

Richmond made a helpless gesture. "I never thought of it as a risk for you. I didn't weigh things up and say to myself—'This is worth more to me than Jael's happiness.' You get caught up in things, and almost before you know where you are the thing's done."

But Jael could not understand. "There must have come a moment," she said, with a pitiful obstinacy, "when you had to decide whether to have her for your mistress or to stop it."

"Oh, my dear," Richmond cried, "feelings don't work like that. They don't arrange themselves in a beautiful order, so that you can see at any moment just what you're doing. I didn't suddenly decide that it was worth while running the risk of hurting you. I never thought about it in that way at all."

She was beyond his words, and her voice had sunk to a thin thread of rasping sound. "I don't know what you thought, Richmond. But I know what you did. And I know that you did it without caring what might come of it for me."

Love and pity, and a queer anger struggled in his voice. "Try to understand," he said. "I know it has turned out like that. But I did care about you. And I didn't think things would come to this pass. Don't you believe me?"

Jael cried bitterly—"I no longer believe in you nor respect myself."

"You're being foolish, Blossoms."

She turned her head about like a wild thing caged. "I—I'm suffering," she said. "I hate it that I didn't count with you."

He could not reach her, though he told her with every

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emphasis of tender love that she did, in her own childish word, count most desperately.

"Not enough," Jael repeated. "Did I count for much just now when you came home to me by way of her?"

He fought his own consuming bitterness. "You counted most," he said again. "And always."

"Oh," Jael cried. "For what?"

"You were my real love," he said. "It was you I wanted to live with. You were my wife. You asked me once why I came home early from Robert Marsh's farm. It was because I *wanted* to come to you. I've always wanted you. Can't you see it?"

Jael gave a little sob. "She said, that girl said—'I won't let anyone make use of me.'" The blood burned under the dim ivory of her cheeks. "I've always been glad for you to—use me, Richmond. If I had been less—less utterly for you, perhaps you would not have wearied of me."

"I didn't weary of you, little thing," he murmured.

He was half angry with her single-minded honesty, that could not understand the poorness of his folly.

Suddenly she began to cry. He took her in his arms, but she held her poor twisted face away from him.

"You took her into the enchanted wood," she said pitifully. "There's nothing left—nothing—nothing."

He groaned in the bitterness of his punishment.

"I didn't think you'd be so grieved," he said unhappily. "Jael. I'd give the world for it not to have happened. Don't be so dreadfully hurt about it."

Her tears ceased but he felt the anguish of her body in his arms. She said—"You've taken everything. It's I who have been shown to her. You've told her all my secrets."

"I'm so sorry, dear love. I'm ashamed."

Jael cried—"I'm sick with shame."

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He held her desperately. "Don't let it hurt you so, Jael. Don't."

She moved away from him and sat down on the window seat, her hands folded quietly in her lap. "It's mean of me to behave like this under your very eyes."

He thought—"If only I were not the cause of it, my dear." She spoke in a small voice. "I can't bear it, you know. I think of the times you must have come to me from her. I wish I could tear out my brain that goes on thinking and thinking of it. I'm beaten to the ground. I'm humiliated in my own sight, Richmond."

Richmond closed his eyes so that he should not see the wounded thing in hers. "It's not you who are humiliated. Jael dear."

She said softly—"Who else? Who else is the butt of clowns? You've humbled me as no one else *could* have done."

He tried to tell her—"It is your pride that is hurt," but she caught his hand and pressed it against her breast so that he felt the leaping of her heart. "Is it pride that hurts like this?" she said, in a bitter crying voice. "I shall die of this pride, Richmond," and shrank from the swift passion of his arms.

He spoke out of a long silence. "You're making too much of it, Blossoms."

She smiled dimly. "Am I?"

"There are some things to be said for me, Jael." He paused and spoke slowly. "You talk as if there were only one thing in life. Doesn't our marriage mean anything to you but just this one sort of faithfulness? We've been friends. Doesn't that mean anything? Don't all the other things we've been to each other count for anything at all? Suppose I'd *thought* about the girl—and refrained? Wouldn't that have mattered to you? Don't thoughts count for anything?"

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Jael lifted her hands and let them fall idly on her knee again. "I don't know," she said. "I expect it's not easy to control one's thoughts. No one can—all the time. But you could have controlled—yourself, Richmond. There ought to have been something—oh, surely *something*—in our marriage, for which you were willing to—to deny yourself."

"Why should I have denied myself?" Richmond asked fiercely. "I didn't realize you would be so—disappointed. If I had, this would never have happened. Can't you believe me? I didn't know."

She said slowly, "I'm afraid I'm not very spiritual, Richmond." He smiled at that childish phrase. "Don't laugh at me," she said. "I've tried to be. Elizabeth Hender is the most spiritual person I know. I've tried to be like her. One ought not to think so much of bodily things—the sight and touch of people. They've meant so much to me. I expect this is a punishment on me for remembering——" she faltered a little—"for loving and remembering all the dear love you gave me of your hands and your whole body. I remembered things you said, Richmond."

"Do you think I didn't remember them?" he said painfully.

She gave him a clear candid gaze. "We were to live together and be kind to each other always—and loyal and honest—always. A *real* marriage. You said it yourself, Richmond. Didn't you remember? Didn't you remember it at all, my Richmond?"

He said—"Yes. I remembered."

"But not cared."

He spoke out of his bitter hurt. "It wasn't possible," he said. "A marriage like that. It was a dream. It wasn't real—or natural."

Jael pleaded with him pitifully. "It was more than a dream to you once. You thought it beautiful once."

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He said—"Did you expect me to remain always the same and never to change or grow?" She asked him softly if he had grown wiser, and he laughed. "I've grown to understand life," he told her. "You're living in a mediæval romance, my dear. In a dream."

Jael could not bear that. "I thought you dreamed it too," she entreated him. "I didn't know. I didn't know you thought that to keep faith was dull and—unnatural. And you didn't think so once, Richmond."

She held out her hands to him, but he would not take them. A queer cold obstinacy had risen up in him at sight of her tears.

"This is life," he said. "Not a dream or a romance. I've changed. Life is always changing. Nothing ever turns out just as you thought it would. You can't live and not change. It's life you'll have to share with me now. Or refuse to share —if you like."

Jael cried absurdly—"If this is your life, I don't want it. It's not what you offered me. It's not what you taught me to look for. I've been cheated. You've cheated me, Richmond." She stammered, fighting her tears. "Is it life where the best things turn to the worst, and the best-loved persons are most cruel, hurt you and shame you as no enemy ever could? Is that life? Oh, it's worse than anything I ever imagined could happen to me."

He tried, in a ruthless gentle way, to silence the crying child in her with arguments. But Jael wrung her hands in distress. "I can't argue with you," she faltered. "You didn't think like this before. It hurts me to hear you say it now. I can't bear it, but I suppose I'll have to. It makes nonsense of our marriage and the joy we had in it. It makes me just a fool of a girl who became an ordinary wife and was deceived in the ordinary way. And you don't see. You won't understand.

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Oh, I shall get it into my head some day that you really do feel differently about it now—but it hurts so. I didn't know. I always thought you felt as I did. Now you say—'Our views clash.' 'Views' is funny, Richmond. It's very funny." She laughed. "And now I don't know what I'm saying, but don't argue with me about herd morality and conventions. I don't understand it, and how do you know you're right now? You thought before you were right, you know." She choked breathlessly. "What have conventions and moralities to do with us? I don't care if all the other people in the whole world are just cowards who keep faith because they're afraid of being punished. I don't believe it, but I don't care if it's true. This is you and me—not just people. I don't care if you break all the laws on earth, but I care if you're dishonest with me, and if our marriage is spoiled."

He sat beside her and took her in his arms, where she rested in utter exhaustion. He said gently—"If I could have foreseen what it would mean to you—and to me, for after all, I'm hurt too, Jael——" she lifted her cold lips in a fugitive caress—"I would never have failed you."

She was choking with grief and pleading desperately. "You didn't always think that it was foolish and narrow-minded that two people should keep themselves for each other and give up things for each other and be honest with each other. You know you didn't. Why do you hurt me by mocking at me now?"

He grew more obstinate the more his heart cried out for her. "I'm not mocking at you, Blossoms," he said. "God forbid. And I don't think it foolish. But I think that you are foolish when you set such store by a wretched convention."

She tore herself out of his arms and sprang to her feet, a slender, flaming creature. "Oh," she cried. "Oh. What is the use of talking about conventions to a woman in agony!"

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Richmond faced her. She flung her head back and he saw the pulse beating in her throat.

"I don't care anything about them," she cried. "I don't care about anything, except to know why you did it to me."

He spoke with a low-voiced effort. "Do you think you're not capable of doing the same thing, Jael?"

She tried desperately to control herself, blind and choking in the waves of grief and anger that swept over her, bruising her, beating her. "I might have been carried away by passion," she cried, poor passionate child. "But I couldn't have gone on lying to you and tricking you so long and so carefully as you have tricked me. If you'd treat me like that, you'd do anything to me."

He tried to hold the distracted girl. "I was mad."

She struck down his arms. "Not mad," she got out. "Not mad. It wasn't madness. It went on too long for that. It wasn't madness that kept you creeping round to hotels with your mistress."

He caught the echo of John Trude's savage malice. "You're very bitter, Jael."

She put her arm across her eyes in a gesture of defeat. Her body drooped. "I can't feel any joy in you," she said forlornly, "or pride or confidence. I could be crying all the time. I'll never be proud of myself again. I'm old. Oh I'm old, Richmond."

He could say nothing except—"You'll forget this, Jael."

The devil tore her again, and she turned on him. "That would be nice for you," she said softly. "We could all be comfortable again, and your little adventure would be just a sweet romantic memory, and I should be smiling and saying—'Men will be men, and I'm so pleased that you still love me.' Perhaps I'll feel like that some day. I don't at the moment. It's a night and a morning since the wife found out, as they

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say in the songs, and I'm still tortured—such jolly songs, Richmond, written about me—you didn't know I'd ever heard any, did you?"

Her bitterness was dreadful to him. He said—"Jael. Little thing." And lifted useless hands.

The uncanny fury had gone out of her again. She looked a daunted child and stood like one, with her hands clasped in front of her.

"You don't understand," she told him softly. "I could have borne for you to have the girl. I—I've always let you have the things you wanted. I might have been unhappy, but I could have borne it and faced it in my mind. If you wanted her so much, why you had to have her. But you didn't have to make me the butt of your lies and shame me with your secret thoughts. It's that I can't face. I'm sick with shame and disappointment. Why didn't you *tell* me, Richmond? Why did you let me lay up for myself so many bitter memories of things I've said and done in my ignorance? It went on too long. You shouldn't have gone to her in London. You shouldn't have put that shame upon me. Oh, Richmond, what an end to our proud words. Oh, you should have told me. You should have told me."

He said inaudibly—"Men don't tell these things to women."

"But it's not men and women. It's you and me, Richmond. Didn't you remember me?"

"I thought you were content," he said. "And one *doesn't* think at these times, Jael."

"You must have known that you were going to want her."

He said steadily—"When I knew that, it was too late to think."

Her eyes blazed out of her white and strangely sunken face. "Why didn't you come and tell me what was happening to you?" she said. "I'd have *fought* for you. You never told

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me. I must have failed you somehow. But you never gave me a chance. You crept off with your mistress behind my back." She paused and flung at him a name for Buddy that coming from her sent the blood thudding madly through his head. He shouted at her and she flinched, which was horrible to him.

"I'm sorry," he stammered. "I'm sorry. But I couldn't leave her to your mercy like that. Did you expect me to? You have a poor enough opinion of me, haven't you, Jael?"

She said slowly—"Did you show me much mercy, the two of you?"

"Perhaps not," he answered her hardly.

Jael's eyes were like stones. "She knew what she was doing. She knew you were married and—loved your wife. Didn't she?"

He said—"Yes."

"Nothing I could do to her," she said thinly, "would hurt her as bitterly as you let her hurt me. But you needn't be afraid for her. I shan't do anything, you know."

He thought—"It's spoiling you too, my darling," and said aloud—"I was often damned miserable, Jael. There's a Puritan in me too, for all I've loathed their stupid canting."

She said smoothly—"I'm sure you were unhappy. But it didn't prevent you from doing anything you wanted to, did it? You weren't too unhappy to climb into her bed o'nights. O most excellent Puritan."

In the silence that followed he caught sight of her hands, and through all his horror of her passionate wild crying and dreadful naked grief he was stabbed with pity for her hands. They had done so many kind and tender things for him and were now twisted and bruised in the grip of her anguish.

He said quietly—"It's no use my losing all my self-respect over this thing, Jael dear. You're wasting your time trying to punish me. You can't make me feel more bitterly sorry than

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I do. You'll only succeed in making me resentful. Forgive me."

"I don't want to punish you," she said sorrowfully. Her face had changed again and she looked pitifully at him. "I want nothing but an impossible thing, Richmond. I'm such a fool. I keep on expecting you to say something that will give me back my self-respect. My mind won't have it that it's all true. I have to make myself understand that it did happen. I wouldn't have believed that I could be so stupid." She put her hands to her breast and said quietly—"Why should this have to happen to *me*, Richmond?"

He said tenderly—"My dear. My dear dear wife. Can't I comfort you again and kiss the joy back into your heart?"

Jael looked at him and his offered arms and did not move. She said softly and clearly—"Can't you see that I'm in hell, Richmond?"

Then there came over her a horror of herself and the pit that had opened in her heart. She whispered—"Oh, I shouldn't have said all these things to you. They'll be between us always."

She looked at him with a queer wonder, and said—"Forgive me. I prayed not to be mean and I have been dreadfully mean," and turning, ran out of the room.

Richmond let her go. He thought—"She won't cry any more just now, poor child. She's cried herself nearly to death."

He went out and rode over to Starcross to consult Bellber on a host of small worries. He rode in an abstracted weariness that took small heed of the road, and but that the mare knew every hole and ditch between Trudesthorp and Starcross had likely come to grief. He put his hand in his pocket and finding the crumpled letter Jael had given him, tore it up without even a passing thought of the writer. She did not exist in a world

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that held only himself and Jael and a frightful gulf that in one hour had opened at his feet.

He thought of Jael with something like amazement at the strange passionate spirit that dwelt in her delicate body. He had known it there, had seen it, had seen her swaying to him like a small goddess, divinely aflame, had seen her burning with a joy that made his own seem a dim flicker, and seen her, when she had been hurt or grieved, grow small and lifeless under his very eyes. Life had not dulled Jael as it dulls most mortal creatures, thus saving them from dying of disappointment. He thought, with a swift prick of fear, that her wild bright spirit might beat itself to death against this. He began to feel horribly afraid and helpless. She was such a foolish little thing. She didn't understand what life was like.

He choked with a sudden boyish grief. "I wish she didn't have to understand," he said. "I wish her life hadn't been like this. I wish I had been kinder or more honest." He saw that to her shy tempestuous innocence his love-making had indeed been in some soft passionate wise a sacrament, which now she saw ruined and defiled by the treachery that had admitted a stranger to the inner shrine. He had made her suffer an agony of shame. "Oh, forgive me," he murmured. "I didn't know. I didn't know, Jael." He swallowed hot tears of grief and weariness. She had been such a shy and loving child when he took her. He saw her beaten and crying, and felt—with a sudden desolate grief—the loss of her warm confident love. "It can never be the same," he said, and in the moment of its passing saw how very good it had been, so unstinted, unafraid, and so glad and kind, and now to have lost it with the morning glory of her joy and the sword-keen sharpness of her young girl's pride.

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He came back to Trudesthorp after dusk and found that Jael had put David to bed and gone out.

"Was she riding?" he asked.

Theodocia said—"No," and had a mind to say more, but that the stern exhaustion in Richmond's face silenced her. She contented herself with saying—"The poor maid's weary. See to her when she comes in," and went sadly off to bed. She had a deep savage love for Jael and a poor opinion of men, but she knew that they were the lords of the universe and must not be driven too far. . . .

Jael walked along the lower fields. The moor and its silences frightened her to-night, and she wandered towards the village, with her back to Weetwood. The stream made a pleasant kindly song for her, and once she saw two lovers standing in the shadows of a gateway. Their murmuring speech reached her as she stole past and stabbed her, like wrath in death and envy afterwards.

The moonlit sky was cold and blue, save where white clouds like foaming waves swelled and rolled above the hills, and in the highest dome of heaven a few blown white wraiths fled before the winds of the upper air. Jael wandered, a minute dark speck in the vast silence of an empty world.

She knew already that she would not always feel such sharpness of physical pain for Richmond's betrayal. But as she stumbled forward the pain grew until the fierce pressure of her hands on her breast could not numb it. She knew that she was a little mad. She was crying again, too, and could not see properly. She repeated foolishly—"Richmond did this," and after a while began to talk to him in a hurried whispering voice. She flitted off the path and round the broad meadow, a small stumbling wide-eyed figure, wringing her hands absurdly and talking, talking.

"I can't bear it. Too many lies, Richmond. Too much to

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remember. Your thoughts all these years, they burn me.

"Pride, Richmond. Why, yes, my dear, I was very proud of you. I kneeled down once and thanked God for letting you love me. That shows how proud I was, doesn't it?

"There are no lovers now," she said childishly, and remembered—*No man but Launcelot and he is dead,* and *Alone, withouten any companye.* The old perfect words comforted her a little, like merciful hands, until their magic faded and the real world closed round her. She remembered her wound, and a thin half-articulate whispering came again between her twisted lips. It was an odd uneasy sound in the empty night.

"You came to her *first.* You've given her everything. You've been lying in my arms and thinking of her. I could kill myself to tear it out of my mind, Richmond. Oh, I'm killed now. If only you'd told me. If only you'd told me. I could have borne that. It's silly to argue with me, Richmond."

And once she thought despairingly that if she had only stayed with him instead of coming to David, none of it would have happened.

She began to talk in a quieter voice, and pleaded with Richmond to agree with her. "My dear," she said, "it's the way you did it. You see that, don't you? Your lies have poisoned the hurt. These aren't silly words, are they? You can see that I couldn't ever love the wood again with the vision before me of you there with her. I wonder if you *do* find that stupid. You see, you gave me no chance to keep my self-respect about it. . . .

"It's no use, my dear," she murmured. "You must be patient with foolish Jael. I expect you're very disappointed in me. I'll try and be more sensible about it." And then she stopped and covered her eyes. "I don't want to be sensible," she said wildly. "I'm hurt. I'd like to die. I wish I'd died before I knew. My heart hurts—you can't feel how

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it hurts." She began to run. The trailing branches caught at her hair and face, and tears choked her. "Why did you do it to me, Richmond? After the enchanted wood and all the dear things, and being poor together, and happy—you *were* happy. You never thought of them or cared about them. Oh, how could you, Richmond? I loved you so. You said you'd be good to me. This hurts me, Richmond."

She stood still, and as though in that last passionate fit the fever burned itself out, grew quiet. She was weak, like a person delivered past expectation from great danger, and her first thoughts turned straight to Richmond. Poor Jael, she had no fleeter or dearer thoughts for all that she had just been asking pity for herself. She thought anxiously that she must have made him very unhappy, and she turned to hurry back so that he would see how quiet she was now. She was deadly tired, but the desire to comfort him urged her up the steep bridle-path at a pace that shook the breath out of her in little gasps. She was white and swaying desperately when she reached Trudesthorp, and Richmond caught her as she stumbled into the hall. He had grown so anxious that the sight of her face angered him. He said sharply—"Have you no sense at all, Jael?"

Her small face was drawn and lined with exhaustion, and her eyes were empty. She lifted her hands with an effort and took the pins out of her hair, so that the dark plaits fell on each side of her face and seemed to drag her head down with their weight. She stiffened when he spoke as if his voice had whipped a little strength into her, but when she got into the room stumbled into the nearest chair.

He looked at her unkindly. "You little fool," he said.

Her white face burned, and anger drove the lassitude out of her limbs. The ghost of John Trude's indomitable

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malice flickered in her eyes and she forced her lips into a pale mockery. She lifted her head and said softly—"I'm sorry I made such a fuss, Richmond. So unreasonable of me. I am sure you must have had a beautiful time. Was she very much in love, and you, oh so gentle and considerate and sweet with her? It must have been ever so romantic and jolly."

Richmond's mouth was grim. "It wasn't," he said.

She laughed. "What, not romantic? Telling those side-splitting lies to the wife and going off to hotels with the pretty girl? Not romantic? Oh, Richmond, how can you?"

He said—"You are pleased to be witty," and the cold words stung her to a savage rage.

"Witty," she said, and gasped. "How could you go first to make love to that girl and come to me the night after? I don't understand how you could do it to me. Make me understand it. Explain it to me so that I can see."

He thought—"Oh God, I can't bear to stay here and see her so spoiled and angry. I shall have to get out." But he did not go. "I'd been with her before, Jael," he said painfully.

Jael caught her breath on a gasping sob. "Yes—but to come like that. You've made me hateful in my own sight—and unclean. Unclean."

He said quietly—"Exactly, my dear. You pretend to be thinking of my faithlessness, and really you're only thinking of yourself."

She thrust out her face. "Why should I think of you? I *must* think of myself. Make me see how you could do it to me."

"You're foolish."

"Foolish!" She could hardly get out the bitter words. "Am

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I foolish because I don't understand why you wanted to deceive me with a vulgar little wench you found in the Air Force? I suppose it does seem foolish to you."

He had lost his own temper now and told her furiously that he was ashamed of her.

She said—"Ashamed? You!" He gripped her wrists and shook her dreadfully. "Haven't you any sense of decency left?" he said.

She wrenched one hand free and cried—"Why should I have? Would you understand it?" and then went horridly limp in his grasp, so that she would have fallen if he had not held her.

He was breathless and sick with horror of himself.

"Jael, Jael darling," he stammered. "Forgive me. I'm mad. Oh, haven't I hurt you enough?" She was lying in his arms with closed eyes. "Are you going to faint, Blossoms? Open your eyes." She opened them and even smiled at him.

He held her very gently, with a heart beating wildly between compassion and regret for his unkind hands. "Why do you go on thinking and thinking about it, little love? You can't alter it."

She murmured—"I know, I know," and moving from his arms, groped for a chair. She began to cry terribly, with her arms flung out across the table and her body racked and quivering. She was utterly spent and cried in a hopeless despairing way that was dreadful to hear. Words and broken phrases came in gasps, as if torn from very depths by the fury of the storm. "I can't do anything. I can't put it right. There's nothing to do. Nothing can be done. It's done. It's done. I can't make it right."

He knelt beside her and held one outflung hand, and as if his touch soothed her, she began to check her frightful crying.

"I mustn't talk any more," she said. "I'm just silly with

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thinking. It's no use either, because you'll argue with me and I can't bear it. I'm tired, Richmond. I'm sick and desolate. I'm raw. I'm sorry if you're disappointed, but I'm so torn to pieces I can't pretend about it."

He said—"Hush, hush," but she went on softly, with now and then a shuddering little cry.

"I was so proud of being your lover and of having shared so many dear intimate things with you. It's hard to find you've shared them with some other person. I mean—there's nothing for me to be so proud of after all, is there?"

His hand slipped from hers and he bowed his head on to her knees.

She drew a shaken breath and said—"I know, I ought to be more sensible, Richmond, and more spiritual. But I can't just now. I can't forget about it so soon. I don't know why I'm so tortured. It's an abiding torture. I'm burned up with it. I think I've always been a little unreasonable about you. I've got things out of proportion. No one ought to mind like this."

She felt his hands clasping her body, but she was too tired to touch the dark head against her knee. "I had a secure peace in my heart and lived with you in a garden. A garden enclosed, darling. Do you remember? There's only a place full of restless dreadful thoughts. I've nothing. It's so terrible that the garden can't be made again. Please forgive me. I ought not to mind like this."

She tried to lift his head, but he caught at her hands and held them. "Don't mind," she said, "oh don't mind. I soon shall forget. It will be better to-morrow, and the next day better still. Darling Richmond, look at me and see that I'm not crying now."

He looked and looked away. "It's such a shame," he said, and faltered, "it's such a dreadful shame that you've *got* to

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forget. I didn't think, when we began, Jael, that our marriage would come to this, just to a dullness and a dull learning to forget. I didn't mean it to be like that."

"Oh, it won't be," she said. "See, I love you, Richmond."

He got unsteadily to his feet and she smiled at him out of her small sunken face, fighting for his sake the dreadful aching lassitude that surged over her.

"I'm going to bed now, Richmond," she murmured, and lifted her face to be kissed. . . .

She was kneeling on her bed drawing back the curtains of the window when he came. He looked very tired and young, and said humbly—"I expect you'd rather I didn't come."

She sighed and smiled a little. He bent over her. "I'd like to stay with you," he said. He lifted her gently against his heart. "Because of all the times you lay here and were happy, Jael, lie here once more."

She heard his voice like a remote and murmuring sound, as she fell down and down between dark walls of sleep. She did not move and hardly seemed to breathe. Sleep swept down upon her in an instant of time. She but touched him, and slept.

He lay awake a long while, thinking what a thin and windy folly was all his talk of herd morality and conventions. That was all unreal and meant nothing. It was only empty words he had taken to build up the rents in his own pride. This was the only reality, this girl sleeping a sleep like death in his arms. He had come this day very near her, and seen her naked love shining the light of its white courage through the madness of anger and grief. She had lifted her torn hands to comfort him, and smiled with her tortured lips.

He whispered—"My dear, my very dear."

The lies, the spirit's chaff, the rags of a worldly faith, the

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fever of unrest, slipped from him. He was through the Valley of Humiliation and had his love against his breast.

Poor Jael had still a little farther to go, but now she slept and saw neither the slopes of the Valley of Humiliation nor the darkness of the Valley that comes next after it.

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CHAPTER II

IN the morning Richmond rode across Nethermoor. "I'll come back as soon as I can, darling," he told Jael. "I wish I hadn't to go. You'll be all right?"

She smiled and nodded, and when he had gone went hurriedly to her work. The day would be all right, she thought, though she was a little bewildered by the way ugly thoughts had of leaping at her in odd moments: she thrust them away and they went, leaving her sick and gasping. But in the evening, at night, when she was tired and had not the energy to push them away, they would creep out and take her by the throat and choke her. Jael shivered and made a prayer to be sensible.

Mrs. Bellber rode over from Starcross in the late afternoon. She found Jael sitting in Janet Trude's garden with her hands folded in her lap. So deep in thought the girl was that she did not hear the sound of Mrs. Bellber's heavy boots on the flagged path nor her smothered "Good God, m'dear." Mrs. Bellber laid a gauntleted hand on Jael's shoulder and the girl leaped up like a wild thing.

Mrs. Bellber was startled. Jael's eyes had been turned to some searing vision, and now, as she faced round, were washed clean of all thought and made narrow and secret. They were sunk, and blurred as only hours of weeping and hot tears of agony could make them. Mrs. Bellber's honest eyes flickered over Jael's face: her heart misgave her.

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"Something has happened to you, child," she said.

The child stiffened and said in a cool steady voice—"What could happen to me, Mrs. Bellber?"

The older woman shook her head. "It's Richmond, I suppose," she murmured.

The girl's dignity went to her heart. "Richmond?" Jael said politely, and lifted level brows. "You wanted to see him perhaps?"

Mrs. Bellber took Jael by her slender shoulders. "Oh, m'dear," she said. "There's no sense in lying to me. You were married in the sheets I gave you. I'm your mother on earth if you've got one."

Jael said nothing, but let Mrs. Bellber read the truth in her eyes, too tired to feel abashed at the sharp scrutiny.

"It is Richmond, then?"

Jael said dully—"Did you know?"

Mrs. Bellber smiled. "Oh," she said, "David's not dead and Jude's not dead and Richmond was alive this morning. There's only one thing left. You've just discovered that Richmond's a man and you're—a wife."

Jael found that hard to take, but it was a clean thrust and she took it cleanly and without a quiver.

"Why, yes," she said, and added quaintly, "I'm so glad it's you. I felt lonely this morning and had thoughts of going to see Elizabeth Hender about it, but I didn't go because I knew she would be so *good,* and I don't just feel ready to be good myself."

Mrs. Bellber was too old and wise to offer pity. She said calmly—"You were bound to be hurt, because you've so little sense. You never had any sense at all about Richmond. You gave 'un too much and expected too much."

"He seemed kind," Jael said simply.

"He's a man, m'dear, and as kind as the rest of us."

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"If I'd been more *used* to men and things," Jael said earnestly, "I might not have been so shocked."

Mrs. Bellber laughed and said—"Heaven forbid. I ha' a modern woman for a daughter-in-law. She's a vulgar fool and writes books in praise of adultery. She thinks she understands men. Give her her due, she does understand a few crude things about 'un, but his heart is still a mystery to her. Even more of a mystery than it was to my grandmother, who had more lovingkindness to help her, if less knowledge of the world. That's what they call it, m'dear—knowledge of the world. For my part, I can never understand why girls should be proud of having learned to behave like loose women."

Jael was smiling her elfin smile. "Did they behave better when you were young?" she murmured.

"Most of 'em did," Mrs. Bellber said grimly. "And the others didn't boast themselves. Nowadays young women talk of their glorious freedom and mean a bedroom in a hotel. It's the fashion to smile at the age in which I was brought up, and I make no doubt it had its share of foolish men and wicked men. But at least it called clean things clean and vile things vile." Mrs. Bellber paused. "Freedom," she said quietly, and—"Oh, the poor spoiled creatures."

Jael looked at her shyly, forgetting to listen. "Isn't it a pity," she said softly, "that dreams and lovely things have to be spoiled?"

"It's life," Mrs. Bellber answered, and tapped the laughing faun behind the rose bush with her crop. "It's life."

"They *could* be kept," Jael said earnestly.

Mrs. Bellber's face, like a grotesque leather mask, blinked and twitched. "Oh God, could be," she said.

"It's the frightful loneliness," Jael murmured.

"Everyone has to live alone," Mrs. Bellber said. "We forget that. We think our lovers have saved us from the common

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lot, until the day when they betray us, and then we are more lonely than before. Even a dream is comforting—while it lasts."

"Richmond says I have been living in a *moyen âge* romance."

Mrs. Bellber shook herself: her eyes twinkled. "I dare say he's right, m'dear," she said loudly. "I never could feel properly romantic myself. The first time I saw poor dear George standing in his nightshirt on his funny fat legs, I laughed. He never forgave me for ut. He said I'd spoiled the romance. I said—'My dear George, what could there be romantic about a man in his shirt!' "

Jael's smile became a gurgle of mirth. "Poor George!"

"Not at all, m'dear," Mrs. Bellber said briskly. "He should ha' known better than to put temptation in my way like that." She eyed Jael shrewdly. "I ha' no doubt you tempted Richmond."

"What do you mean?" Jael opened her eyes.

"Never trust a man to be absolutely faithful to you, m'dear, unless you don't care whether he is or not. It's like offering him unlimited credit and then turning on him for dishonouring it."

Jael sighed. "I don't understand that," she said.

"Of course you don't, my dear. But Richmond would."

She watched the girl's small sensitive face that like a faithful glass mirrored her ardent soul.

Jael stirred, and looked across the garden, where already the velvet-footed dusk crept along the wall.

"I suppose," she said at last, "that every woman thinks—'It could never happen to me.' "

"Do you mind so much, Jael?" Mrs. Bellber asked.

Jael answered quietly—"If I said what I felt, it would sound like the words of a mad woman."

"A jealous woman, m'dear?"

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"No," Jael said slowly. "Not jealous. Desolate. You don't know, of course. There were secrets he ought to have kept."

Mrs. Bellber said harshly—"He forgot."

Jael shook her head. "He forgot nothing," she said steadily. "And he kept nothing back."

"Oh, my dear," the gaunt woman said pitifully, "you won't always feel like this."

"No. I know that." Jael turned to look at the other woman. "But isn't it frightful," she said simply, "that one person can be crying in agony and it just be words to other people?"

"It's always just words," Mrs. Bellber said.

"I've been a fool," the girl went on. "A woman can't expect to keep a man to herself all her life, can she? Unless, of course, she's very wonderful. I ought to have known that."

Mrs. Bellber checked the words that rose to her lips. She turned her head aside and said loudly—"There's never any knowing, my dear. The ugliest woman I knew had eight husbands, all distressin'ly faithful to the day of their death, and she could ha' had thirty if she'd had time. She had the figure for ut."

Jael was not listening. She said gravely—"I've found one thing *most* difficult. It seems to me—I may be wrong—but it does seem to me that I *couldn't* hurt another woman the way she was willing to hurt me."

"I don't suppose you could," Mrs. Bellber said sombrely.

Jael frowned and hesitated over her words. "I mean, that if Richmond hadn't been married, and happy in his marriage——" she lifted grave eyes to Mrs. Bellber's face—"He *was* happy, you know—I shouldn't have thought her—immoral—for being his mistress. It would be her own affair." She paused. "Even as it is, I don't think she's immoral. I expect

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she couldn't help it. Richmond's very dear. I think she's—unkind." Her clear gaze grew troubled. "Women should be kind to each other, shouldn't they? She was a woman. She must have known how much I'd mind."

"She didn't know you," Mrs. Bellber said gently.

"But she knew that if she let Richmond make love to her she'd be hurting another woman dreadfully." Her mouth trembled. "I expect she loved him too much to think," she said. "I—I want to be fair. After all, I couldn't expect a girl who didn't even know me to be more loyal to me than my own husband was, could I? But women ought to be kind to each other, I think."

"You expected too much of Richmond, m'dear."

Jael said softly, "I didn't, you know, expect anything from him that he hadn't freely promised me. He did want to give me everything at first. Then he got bored. I bored him."

"I don't think that's true, Jael."

Jael nodded her head. "Oh yes it is," she said. "I think it's easy for a wife to bore her husband. There are so many dull things about marriage. Not having enough money, and David being ill, and responsibility. Also, a wife is always there. A mistress is different. A man has to make a little holiday to get her. It's a change—and exciting. He shares the jolly things with her and escapes the dull ones."

Mrs. Bellber jumped up from her uncomfortable stone seat.

"I think I'll go," she said. "You shock me. You ha' no right to have such thoughts in your head."

Jael took the older woman's hand, hard and square like a man's, but a good hand on a horse's mouth and gentle with frail things. She gave Mrs. Bellber a strange look.

"I have queer thoughts in my head now," she said.

Mrs. Bellber liked neither the look nor the words. She had

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in that instant seen fleetingly a crazy tortured thing that writhed and shuddered and tried to turn its eyes from an intolerable sight.

She rode off, in profound uneasiness, and half-way over the moor met Richmond riding back. She drew rein and hailed him.

"I ha' been to Trudesthorp," she shouted.

Richmond wheeled sharply.

"Oh ay," she said, "I ha' seen Jael."

Jael's husband stared across the moor. Then he turned his head and looked her frankly in the face. "I'm glad you went," he said simply, and added—"I suppose you think I'm a scoundrel?"

"I don't so far flatter you," she retorted. "I think you're a fool."

"Jael was so gay and light-hearted," he said half audibly. "Like a child. My heart aches for her."

Mrs. Bellber regarded him grimly. "Does ut indeed?" she said. "An' if you'd eaten green apples your stomach would ha' ached. I could never abide a maundering sinner. Dear George deceived me, as it's called—though Lord knows why, for no one ever is deceived—more times than either of us cared to remember, and ah always used to come to me at the end of every bout and cry on my neck and tell me I was an angel. Till I lost patience at last and said—'My dear good man, I'm no more an angel than you're a monster of cruelty: you're an adulterer, and I'll thank you not to cry on my new taffety gown.'"

Richmond said—"I suppose that's what I am."

"Of course you are, m'dear. And Jael's no angel. She's been a fool and you've made her pay for her folly. They say that some women don't mind their husband's getting a bit—er—blown upon. I couldn't say, of course, but I dare say they

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all do, if the truth were known. I know I did. Jael does, but maybe she's over-fastidious."

Richmond looked at her oddly. "Will you tell me something, Mrs. Bellber?"

"I'll be as indiscreet as an old woman can," she promised.

He hesitated and asked her—"How much does it hurt a woman—a good woman—to discover that her husband has been—unfaithful?"

"I don't know for that," she told him gravely. "Some 'ull feel it more and some less, but I suppose that at the best it's a bitter disappointment, and at the worst a torture hardly to be borne."

"Not Jael," he cried sharply.

"Jael adored you," Mrs. Bellber said.

She felt a sudden stir of pity for him. His narrow face and wide curving mouth had an appealing charm. It was a youthful face still, with the shadowed beauty that youth wears when his wings are poised for flight—troubled now, and wistful like a boy's. Pity warmed to half reluctant admiration in her old heart. Richmond made a debonair figure for all he was so weary. He moved with a light step and his great strength had an easy grace with it: he was shapely and smoothly muscled as a Greek. She recalled, setting little enough store by it, that the Drews were bred of old and fighting stock. She said harshly—"You're the sort that gets adoration, m'dear, and you ha' had it in good measure from that child. You should ha' paid fairer for ut."

He said—"I know," and added—"There's a rotten spot in me, Mrs. Bellber."

"Nonsense," she told him sharply. "You forgot to be kind, which is easy enough to do, God knows. Kindness makes anything bearable, but it's the last mystery of God." She paused. "Men find it easy to be unkind to women, I think."

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Her eyes under their wrinkled lids softened strangely. "Don't thing I want to call the thunders of Sinai down on you, my dear. The longer I live, the more I am sure there is only one sin—and that's the sin of meanness."

"You think I've been mean," Richmond said.

"I think you must decide that for yourself," she said gently.

She had almost gone when she checked her horse sharply and leaned back. "You'll look to her," she said earnestly. "There's that in her mind I can't like. Get it out. Hurt her if you must. But get it out. The knife's better than dying. Good-bye."

She shouted over her shoulder that he was to come to Starcross later in the evening. "George wants ye," she said. He promised and turned his mare for home. He was tired and the mare was tired, but they covered the road to Trudesthorp in a fine rush. Once there he felt the need for haste over and took his time over bathing and changing before he went in search of Jael. He found her still in Janet Trude's garden, now a place of creeping mist and stealthy shadows, and took her back into the house.

"See what a fire I've built you," he said, and dragged the large shabby couch across it.

She smiled and thanked him, but had nothing else to say, sitting there so childishly, with small fine hands folded in her lap and secret dreaming eyes.

He said tenderly—"You're still thinking, Blossoms, and letting your thoughts push me farther and farther away. You shouldn't." He sat beside her and took her hands. "I've been thinking things over, too. I'm not altogether a fool, you know, darling. I've let you talk. I've answered all your questions and let you say anything that came into your head and insult me in any way you thought fit. It's your right, my dear, after all. But I've been making my own discoveries all

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the time." He paused. "You talk of your love for me and your joy in me. And you set against these things the thought that I've used my most intimate knowledge of you to shame you. I've been unfaithful to you with one other woman who loved me, and you tell me that I've destroyed everything worth having in our marriage. But surely one bone must be thrown to the dog? Surely it was I who made love and marriage beautiful for you? Isn't my love worth *anything* to you because I shared it with another woman?"

She stirred and drew back so that the shadows hid her. He saw only the line of her face, soft, implacable, stricken, and the gesture of an upflung appealing arm. "You can't have it both ways, Richmond. You can't talk to me now of the past without making the present more bitter." She lifted a small clenched hand. "Oh, I know I must be sane and just and all the other things. But you have no right to expect it yet. You can't hurt a person to death and then say—Now do be sane about it."

He spoke against that level bitter voice.

"*I* helped to make the past, Jael. You can no more throw it away than I can, nor wipe out one hour of it. It's part of you. You can't say to me—'You're not my lover: you're another man, a liar and a traitor,' and say no word for the other Richmond. Because I am still that boy who loved you and was gentle with you—then."

"No," Jael cried. "No." She huddled away from him in a corner of the couch. "You're not the same. Nothing's the same. It's all spoiled, Richmond."

He tried to touch her, but she shrank from him so fiercely that he drew back his hand. "Oh, my little sweet," he said, "my heart agrees with you even though I know you're wrong. It's not my boy's love you're regretting. It isn't, Jael. It's a lot of romantic trappings. They were beautiful—oh, I'm not

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denyin' it, but they're not my love for you, nor, under your pardon, yours for me. God forbid. Can't you see it, Blossoms? If it were my love you are crying for, you'd be happy to have it all your own once more."

She thrust out a vehement hand. "Is it for you to say that?" A smile curved her soft mouth, a strange proud ironic smile, stabbing Richmond with a sudden grief.

"I'm being brutally frank," he said sadly. "Don't be angry with me, Jael. You cry over the dreams you've lost. But *they* are not my love. Don't you know it? Look into your heart and see for yourself. Don't throw such a burden of regret on me, Jael. I can't bear it. No man could."

He heard her draw a sobbing breath. "I don't understand half of it," she said. "It's like someone shouting outside a door. It's no use scolding me."

He said—"I'm not, Blossoms."

"Sometimes," she said, "I think nothing matters, since you are with me again. But often I only remember that it's *you* who didn't love me enough to—to save us. Because it's you, I've no pride or decency to help me through it. I'm stupid with crying and trying to understand it." She paused and said in a small wavering voice—"I'm sorry you're disappointed in me, Richmond. So sorry."

He moved so that he could touch her in a fugitive caress. "It wasn't me you loved, little thing, but things about me—dreams dreamed with me, Jael, and moments shared. Not the real me."

Her voice faltered a little. "Which is you?" she asked. "Do you mean I'm to love the one who came to me from another woman's bed?" She blinked away hot tears and straightened her slender gallant body. "You think I'm a fool and grieving for a dream. But I'm not. I'm grieving for real things lost. I've failed so utterly. Oh, can't you see? Don't you hate it

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yourself that I'm just the stupid deceived wife? You must have despised me dreadfully that nothing I was could wring one moment of frankness from you. Oh, you should have told me."

He said—"I couldn't, Jael. No man could. But I loved you all the time."

"Not enough," she cried, "not nearly enough."

"I didn't love you less because I loved her a little," he said gently. "Can't you understand that?"

"Oh, you're wrong, you're wrong," she said. "You gave her all the joy and tenderness of your love, and she'd been nothing to you. You told her all our secrets, Richmond."

His voice entreated her. "She was only my mistress, Jael. She pleased me, and I took her. Don't you believe me?"

"I believe you think so now," she said quietly.

"It's true, Blossoms."

Jael turned her face towards him. He could not read her shadowed eyes. "Was she only your mistress when you showed her the enchanted wood?" she said softly. Her voice broke. "Oh Richmond, I've thought it all day—the stars between the branches, and the little wind that blew my hair across your eyes. And I—and I—oh, *I* was young then, Richmond. Didn't you remember me? Didn't you remember me? Oh, you shouldn't have given her that. You shouldn't."

He said—"Forgive."

She found a quiet breath to say—"Everything but that, Richmond."

"It *is* your pride that's hurt," he said painfully.

"You can call it pride if you like," Jael answered. "Perhaps it is. But not a mean pride, Richmond. Pride of my body and pride of my soul. Pride of having been everything for you. If only you'd told me. If only you'd told me."

"I wish to God I had, Jael."

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She steadied her voice again. "Do you remember that once I wrote to you and said I would like to come and stay with you for a week?"

"Yes."

"And I came. I didn't know that I was really getting in the way. Poor fool."

He found the sight of her humiliation very hard to bear. "I was so happy to have you, Jael."

"You needn't say it," Jael told him swiftly.

"You don't believe me."

"How can I believe anything," she cried, "or see anything except myself thinking you wanted me, and you all the time thinking of the jolly adventure I'd interrupted?"

He took her almost roughly in his arms. "I never felt like that, little thing."

She stiffened her slim body in his grasp. "The tiresome wife," she said wildly, "and the gay mistress. Better to be your wench than your wife, I think."

He held her closer. "Careful, Jael," he said quietly.

She grew quiet at once. "I never thought you'd make me like other wives," she said pitifully. "The kind of wife people have such jokes about. I'm so ashamed."

He said—"You needn't be, dear heart," and bent to catch the low stumbling voice.

"It's an awful thing to have the pride beaten out of you," Jael whispered. "God must have meant it to be whipped out of me for good, or He wouldn't have set you to do it."

He kissed her hair and her tired eyes. "You won't always feel like this," he said softly. "You'll forget."

She thought—Yes, that's true. It won't always bewilder me and take me by the throat and make me half mad with grief and surprise, and said aloud—"Yes, I'll forget."

"And be happy again, sweetheart."

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At that she looked at him. "Things die," she said, "like persons."

Richmond said gently—"Don't punish me too bitterly, Jael. Do you think it's nothing to me that I've lost your joy and your pride in me?"

Jael drew herself out of his arms. "You've lost nothing," she said. "You threw it away."

He gave her a steady glance. "I love you, Jael." He paused and she saw the grave tenderness of his smile. "Do you think there's a better love waiting for you somewhere? Perhaps there is. But it will never steal to your window at midnight nor kiss your eyes in the dawn, nor bathe your sweet small body. In my heart I can feel every line of it, Jael, and every touch of you. You love me, too. And you'll remember. Do you think I don't *know?*" He paused again. "Oh, my dear, whatever I've done—lied to you, tricked you, shamed you—I've loved you for what you are and not for a dream I had of you."

"It didn't avail me much, did it?" she said, her mouth against his shoulder.

He gathered her into himself again. "Dear," he murmured. "I do love and admire you above everyone I know, and beg and pray your forgiveness, my dear. Don't go on being so dreadfully hurt. I can't bear it. I shall never do anything to hurt you again, Jael."

"It wouldn't matter if you did," she said queerly. "For you have nothing to give away and I nothing to lose."

He rocked her in his arms. "Oh, Jael," he said, "if you really loved me—me, and not the things you thought you had of me—you'd not feel like that. Don't be angry. Don't think I'm turning the steel in raw wounds. Don't think I can't see that nothing will ever be just the same. How could I be so silly as not to see it? But don't go on supposing I'm deaf and blind and drive the nail through my temples, like the other

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Jael. My love. My dear love. You know I never could abide tears. And not your tears, and to know they are for me. Don't go on thinking of me and my carelessness of you, and all those other hateful things. Don't let them spoil you and your beauty, little Blossoms. Don't. It's not worth it. It's not fair to either of us. I'm still here, darling love, and my arms are round you and my heart against yours. Isn't that something? A little? It doesn't comfort you much now, I know. But it will, little thing."

She curled softly against him.

"Think a little of me," he said softly. "I'm suffering, too. Forgive me and help me."

"Oh, Richmond," she murmured, "it's not for forgiveness to be talked of between you and me. It's just that I can't believe it's happened to us, and every hour I have to accept it afresh."

"I always meant," he said unsteadily, "that we should make the marriage you wanted. I thought we should, Jael. I wish we had. Oh, believe me, my dear and only love."

"I want to believe you," Jael said in a low voice. "Be a little patient with me. It's not your love for her that hurts me most. I am ashamed for my blindness. I've been such a poor mocked fool."

"Love's stronger than shame and lies, Jael."

"Your love?" she asked.

He was silent. Then said flatly—"Of course. Stupid of me to say that to you."

She clung to him in a remorseful passion.

"Oh, forgive me," she said. She tried to make amends in a murmur of soft speech, and broke it to cry suddenly—"Say I am more beautiful, Richmond."

He said—"Oh my dear, far more beautiful," and could have wept for pity.

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"Then you always liked best to be with me?"

"Always."

She freed herself from his arms and bowed her head in her hands. "Oh, it isn't true," she cried softly. "It isn't true. But I am grown so poor that I must pretend it is."

"It is true, Jael."

"Even at first," she entreated. "When you were first in love with her."

He said—"Even then, my heart."

She caught his hand and said in a strange hurried voice—"I keep thinking of frightful things. I think of the first night you were with her. Did you remember me then?"

He said painfully—"Don't be foolish, Jael."

"Oh, I won't," she cried. "I won't. I promise you I won't talk of it again."

"I don't care what you say to me, Jael."

She said dreamily—"I expect it was great fun. Going dancing, I mean, and the motor drives at night. Very gay. Of course, there wasn't any money left over for those things when David and I were with you. And then I couldn't have left David at night."

He lifted shamed boyish eyes. "You didn't have much of a time here by yourself, did you?" he said. "You could have had more money if I hadn't been spending it on—on——" She would not let him finish, but flung herself in a soft wild rush upon him.

"I wasn't thinking of that," she cried.

"I know you weren't." He smiled wryly. "That makes it rather worse."

"I'm clumsy," she said sadly.

His voice shook. "You're all too dear."

Her face burned in the dim light. "You won't grieve for—for anything, Richmond?"

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"She wasn't my wife, Jael. She hadn't been my shy adorable sweetheart. She wasn't tender, gracious, and my friend. She was just a girl I wanted and I took. I wish to God I hadn't touched her. It was never worth it for itself. It's a thousand times less worth it for you to be hurt and unhappy."

"You're sure?" she murmured. "You're not lying because you're sorry for me? That would be too cruel. You wouldn't pretend to me now, would you?"

He was crooning tunelessly over her, and said softly—"Don't think that of me, Blossoms."

Jael said—"If I could take the memory of it out of *your* mind, I think it wouldn't be so bitter. I can't bear you to remember all the jolly things you've shared with her. I want to take them away from you. I'm selfish about it. I wish she'd disappointed you. I wish——" she broke off and hid her face. "Oh, you see how mean I am. Don't look down on me, Richmond. I love you so."

"Look down on you!" he cried. "Kindest wife you've been and dearest mistress and sweetest friend a man ever had—and I such a fool."

She held her head back to look at him. "There must be something that you kept for me? A word? A touch?"

Richmond said only her name.

"Some little thing," the thin sweet voice persisted. "Something I had of you that no one else had?"

He bent over her with muffled speech and passion born of pity on his lips.

For nearly an hour she lay half asleep in his arms while the fire flickered out and the shadows crept upon them from the corners of the room.

At last he stirred. "You must get to bed," he said compassionately. "Yes, I know it's very early, little thing, but you need the rest."

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She stood up obediently.

"I'll go now," she said.

He kissed her, and told her—"I'm going to walk over to Starcross."

"You won't stay?"

"Indeed I won't," he answered promptly.

He watched her walk slowly upstairs. She leaned over the landing railing to wave her hand.

"If your plaits were just a little longer," he said mischievously, "I'd be able to climb up them like the prince in the fairy tales."

He carried the echo of her soft laughter out into the glimmering night. . . .

Jael heard him go. She went into her room and moved restlessly about, lighting all its candles, and bringing others until the room was flooded with yellow light. Then she sat down and pressed both hands to her flaming cheeks.

She had a fevered look, but her mind was quiet and numbed to apathy. Her thoughts were all adrift. She had lived through the last hours in a strange twilight mood, hardly feeling the pressure of Richmond's arms, hardly hearing his low-voiced speech, as if she hovered half in and half out of life in a world void of sound or colour or any insistent thing. She swayed slightly as she sat huddled on the edge of her bed and thought dreamily that she must be past the worst of her caring now. She smiled and shrugged her thin shoulders over a distraught girl in a moonlit field. This was the poorest and commonest of tragedies. It was hardly tragic at all, only dreadfully disappointing. "Anyone," argued her apathetic thoughts, "would be disappointed at having to put up with second best for always."

With small secret face cupped in her hands and grey eyes dark like northern seas in a storm she sat and brooded until

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out of the vague flitting images that tossed in her weary brain, one took to itself a little semblance of life. Her eyes, that had been still, changed and flickered as the spirit in them woke. Woke slowly, very slowly, reluctant and lagging. Woke at last to sheer stark agony, welling up from such poisoned depths of bitterness as would have served to drown steadier wits and wiser loves than Jael's.

The faery power she had that turned all her thoughts to pictures now worked, as faery gifts will do, to her most sharp undoing. She fought with the frightful visions that pressed upon her, and they returned as fast as she thrust them back, until she was sick and faint and violently trembling.

She saw Richmond take his young happy mistress in his arms on the day her simplicity thought of as the day of his marriage to her. How kindly and tenderly he looked. So he had looked at herself in the hour of their marriage. So he had looked on her when he woke in the dawn, warm and flushed and heartbreakingly dear. With her hands pressed on her breast she huddled forward, shivering from the chill sweat of mortal anguish, sunk past speech or knowledge in unuttered and unutterable shame. She shut her eyes, but could not shut out the torturing images; they forced themselves upon her, tearing at her last poor defence until she cowered nakedly before them, and once sank on her knees and began an incoherent prayer for help. "Take it away, God," she whispered.

Shuddering, with sobs of agony tearing her body, she came back from the black depths of that degradation. "How wicked I must be," she moaned, "how wicked. To think of such things." A fleeting thought of Elizabeth Hender touched her, like a cool wind, and brought tears gentler than the ones wept in the extremity of her suffering.

John Hender's gentle wife could have told her that no spirit sinks lower or suffers more in sinking than such pure

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ardent spirits as John Trude's daughter had got her somehow out of the reckless and passionate flame of his. But Elizabeth was not there, nor could have been: even the weakest mortal goes to Calvary alone.

Jael found no comforting thought. Her clouded brain groped in a darkness where nothing remained but a sense of irretrievable loss and an abiding shame.

Some impulse led her feet to David's room. She stood looking down at the foreshortened curve of his cheek, and thinking as little of him as of anything else.

Without warning, revulsion leaped upon her out of her darkened mind. She was lapped in a dry shrivelling heat that swept over her, up from feet to head. She thought that she had said aloud words that were spoken only in the empty silence of her mind.

"Oh, if I could put it all away." If she had never given her life into Richmond's hands, he could not have mocked and humbled her. She was burning—burning with hate of Richmond.

She looked down at David, and for a brief instant forgot the dear loving ways of him, and hated him too, because he was the sign and symbol of the shame to which she had delivered herself.

The instant sobered her, and she dropped to her knees beside the sleeping child with cries of remorse and tenderness that her fear to wake him checked. "Darling," she whispered. "Darling little David. I didn't mean it. I didn't, sweet. Little dearest, I didn't." She hung over him, patting the bedclothes, with her arm arched in a yearning gesture. She kissed the soft hair on the pillow and stole out.

And now she could pray, and did—first blowing out all the candles in her room, and kneeling by the window where the moonlight fell on her small lifted face. "I have been very

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wicked, dear God," she said, "and forgotten Your great goodness to me in giving me Richmond, who loves me, and my dear David. I shall never forget it again, if You will help me a little." She paused and added earnestly—"I *could* not be so wicked again, dear God, and so i. is clear I shall get better and more sensible. Thank You for both of them, and for Jude, and bless Richmond and help me to make them happy. For Christ's sake. Amen."

She rose from her knees with the clear eyes of a boy in her weary face. Her hands were raised to loosen her plaited hair when she remembered that the prayer had contained no word for John Trude. She felt an odd spring of affection for him surging up from some childish source. In a tiny distinct picture she saw a small child leaping down the broad stairs of the great hall to be engulfed in a mighty embrace. Since those far-off days she had learned to hate and fear John Trude for all he had done of things hateful and fearful. But he was of her blood, and her blood stirred now and remembered him. She left her hair hanging in its massive dark plaits, lit a candle, and carrying it, ran down the stairs, across the hall, and was halfway along the corridor to the great hall before she paused to think.

She hesitated outside the door. It must be near ten o'clock, she thought, and he had likely been drinking since noon.

He had. He had drunk that day enough to kill a mere hard drinker, and it had served but to mellow him. He regarded Jael with a dancing eye, and swore she had come to coax his house from him.

"You ha' taken my land," said he, "and now covet my house. You'll not get it till I'm dead."

She laughed and settled herself in a chair. "I don't want your house," she told him. "I like my half of it very well."

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"Ah, sings the nightingale?" Trude murmured, in a voice murmurous like far-off thunder.

Jael looked shyly. He was wrapped in a voluminous cloak of some dark fur and his hair swept back from his forehead in a fine fury. "You are very splendid to-night," she said softly.

He was pleased and showed his pleasure in the smile that played on his face like sunshine on a hill-side.

"It had been a poor taking," said he, "if I had been the only unpruned tree left on the place. Besides," he added slyly, "I ha' a fancy to make a good show when I'm found here with my feet stuck out and my chin on my chest." He chuckled. "I shall cost ye something in coffin wood."

"I don't suppose you'll die just yet," Jael murmured.

"The kindness of ye," he mocked. "But I shall die out o' hand, and I know ut. You'll grieve an hour and poor Martha a week. And that's a mean ending for old Trude." He sighed. "I ha' been born out of time," said he. "I should ha' worn steel and sworn quaint oaths by the wrath of God. There were giants on earth in those days. I cannot stomach these puling moderns. They ha' no passions but such as prattle and coo like doves or creep on their bellies into other men's beds. The women are all scrawny and wear wanton clothes and dance before grinning niggers."

"I like dancing," Jael said.

"Oh, ay," he said unkindly. "Why don't ye dance, then? You ha' a coltish husband. I doubt you dance when he pipes, and not else."

Jael slipped from her chair and stood beside him. "You were very kind to me when I was a little girl," she said, "and after that you were cruel to Jude and I hated you. But Jude doesn't hate you now, and I don't."

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Laughter heaved and billowed under the vast fur cloak. Trude had almost died of it before he could choke it down again.

"The saints deliver us," he croaked, "the child's forgiving me." He glanced at Jael's crimson cheeks and said gently—"Now I didn't think to daunt you, Jael, but you should know that forgiveness is nothing. Death may forgive us our sins, but nought else will. There's not a hole on earth deep enough for a man to hide from the smallest of his sins. Don't you repeat that to your pestilential priest," he added hastily, "or he'll think I ha' found heart of grace. Ah thinks no one has eyes and ears but himself."

"Punishment for everything?" Jael asked earnestly.

He grimaced at her. "Ha' you sinned?" he said mockingly. "Be sure you'll smart for ut."

Jael said—"I must go," and was gone before Trude ceased staring.

She did not know what impulse hurried her through the shadows of the corridor and up the stairs to David's room. She had forgotten her candle in her breathless haste to make sure that he was safe, and had now to fumble for another and light it before she could look at him.

Her heart leaped sickeningly. David was not safe. She could see that at a first glance. He was lying with an arm outside the quilt: his small face was colourless and there was a faint blue shadow round his mouth. Jael's hand shook as she put the candle down on a chair, but it was quick and steady on David's body. She lifted him and spoke to him: he was still and limp in her arms, and she could feel no flicker at his wrist. She thrust her hand under his sleeping suit and found him barely warm: his feet and hands were cold, quite cold.

She laid him down and ran to Rosemary's room. The girl

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woke as Jael entered and sat up in startled silence like the half-tamed thing she was.

"Rosemary," Jael said, "Master David is ill. You'll have to go down to the village for Doctor Buchanan."

The girl was already dressing swiftly. "You'll not be afraid to go down the moor road?" Jael asked. Rosemary smiled at the thought of danger on a moonlit night, but said nothing. She needed all her breath for speed.

That had taken less than a minute. Jael was in Jude's room next, and found him sprawling before the fire with books strewn round him on every side. He swung to his feet at the sight of her face. "David's ill," she said steadily. "He's very ill. Will you tell Theodocia and fetch Richmond? He went to Starcross—walking. By the moor path."

She was back with David. She had not been gone three minutes, but already, she thought, there was a further change. His nostrils looked pinched, and the coldness had spread to his knees. She began to rub him.

Came Theodocia next, without her hair and with a short coat buttoned over her gaunt nightgown. She put her hand on his heart, and brought a mirror to hold at his lips.

"The child's dead," said Theodocia.

"No," Jael said steadily. "No."

She continued to rub his limbs with warm unwearied hands.

"Light a fire," she ordered, "and bring me some brandy."

The old woman obeyed. She fetched logs and faggots and a hunting flask of old brandy.

"Put a drop on his tongue," Jael said. "No, fool, not like that. With your finger. Now another. Now close the window and build the fire and then come here to give him a little more brandy."

Theodocia went silently to work. She made a fire of logs and

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then bent over David with the hunting flask in her shaken hands.

At last she straightened herself. "You waste your time," she said, too stunned for pity. "I tell you he's gone."

Jael looked up from her ceaseless rubbing. She felt a cold deadly anger.

"Get out," she said.

Theodocia went, and thought dumbly of death, and John Trude in Jael's eyes.

Jael gathered David into her arms. "Dear," she said softly, "is it cold and dark over there? Are you frightened, little heart? Are you calling—'Mother, come, I want you?'" She rocked him gently. "Quiet, quiet, then, David. I'll come."

She laid him on a blanket before the fire and began again to rub his small body.

"It's not true," she whispered. "Curl in my arms, little thing. Put up your arms and let me feel your mouth on my neck. Just once, David. Just once. You can't go without one smile. One kiss, little son." Her voice grew faint. "Never mind, little David," she said. "Don't you mind about anything. I'll come."

"Oh, God," she cried, "oh, dear God, you don't want my beloved son. You have your own."

Her head swam from weariness, and the flames of the fire made a dazzling swaying wall before her eyes. Cold drops trickled down her forehead into her eyes, so that she could not see properly. Her hands were heavy and the muscles of her arms burned and throbbed as she drove them to their task.

The fire cast shadows, moving flickering shadows. She would have said that David's eyelashes stirred, if she had not known that he was dead.

"Dead," she repeated softly, and then, "No. No." She

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turned her head and spoke to Theodocia, forgetting that she had ordered the old woman out like a dog less than fifteen minutes ago.

"You're a fool, Doxie," she said clearly, "of course David's not dead."

Weary hands and racked arms unfaltering. She had been kneeling there for uncounted hours, with the firelight flickering on David's glorious lashes.

"Ah."

Jael's wild cry reached Theodocia, where the old woman crouched and shivered on the stairs. Tottering on her shrunken legs, with black fear of all Trudes in her heart, Theodocia dragged herself back to the room.

She found Jael bending over David with parted lips and eyes where no dark ghost menaced old frightened women.

"Quick, oh quick, Doxie," the girl said. "His eyelids have moved. The flask on the bed."

Strength poured through Theodocia's limbs. She ran for the brandy, and thought as she ran that Jael's wits were likely wandering.

But the long lashes lifted and a sigh parted David's lips. He looked silently and gravely at Jael and at the fire, and then at Theodocia. The brandy on Jael's finger burned his tongue and he gave her a reproachful glance. He choked and the blood rushed up in his cheeks, driving the waxen pallor before it in a rushing tide. . . .

Came a sound of footsteps on the staircase, and Doctor Buchanan's soft Scotch voice in the doorway. "And what are ye doing to the lad?" he demanded.

It was Theodocia who told him. Jael was leaning against a chair and listening for the sound of Richmond's step. . . .

Jude swung himself along the narrow moor path. The moon rode high in a wide white sky. Under his feet small brittle

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stems of heather crackled and snapped. He splashed through pools of molten light and sent up small fountains in cascades of silver drops. The thin sweet air of the high moorland was sharp in his nostrils, and as he flung himself over the dark ripples of tiny streams he saw where the greedy butterwort filled her secret cup with dew.

He was but half-way to Starcross when he saw Richmond come slowly over the rise of the hill, bareheaded, swaying as he walked, as if the beauty of the night had bewitched him.

Jude quickened his own pace, and breathless, told Richmond what need of haste there was. Richmond listened, said "Thanks," and ran with lithe strides down the twisting path.

Jude stood still and watched him go. The exhilaration of his rush through the night left him suddenly, and he felt a chill sense of isolation. He flung himself down on the heather. After a while, lulled by the heady fragrance of the peat, he slept and did not wake till dawn was striding on the hills. . . .

Richmond found David in his bed, blinking drowsily over the rim of the blanket in which he was still rolled, and smiling uncertainly at the lean Scotch face over his own round one.

The Scotchman was a good doctor, with as much kindness as skill in his large hands, and that was a deal. If he drank more whisky than water he needed it in a desolate upland where his patients might lie twelve miles apart and at all points of the compass.

He turned as Richmond came in, and to the younger man's questions gave the most cautious of replies.

"Yon old dame," he said, pointing a lean finger at Theodocia, "says the boy neither breathed nor stirred. Your wife says she rubbed him for more than half an hour without seeing a sign of life." He paused. "The lad says a black cat came in an' threw him over the edge of a cliff. He must have had the

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worst kind of bad dream." He paused. "The mystery of life——" said he, and paused again. "I have seen one such case before—the soul drifted loose. No one should know better than me on what a thin thread hangs a child's life. They live as lightly as they breathe." He fingered the muscles of Richmond's arm. "You've sinews," said he, "and a grip on life 'ud take steel between your ribs to loosen. Such as him," he nodded at David, whose eyelids were fast getting too heavy for the curiosity that pricked them open—"such as him will uncurl their fingers and slip out of life with no more than a sigh."

He turned to Jael. "Your boy's all right," he said gently. "You brought him back yourself, and I'll be bound I couldna ha' done it. I'll come in the morning and look him over. I haven't a doubt he'll be up and roaring. I'll try over his heart for ye again, but I don't expect to find it wrong. You can watch him to-night if you like." He smiled at her. "If I tell ye something frightened the child out of life as he slept, ye'll take fright yourself, and I'd be saying what I'll laugh at myself in the morn." He added sombrely—"It's no very likely to happen again, Jael lass. There are strange places in the mercy of God but no boundaries set."

He went, and Theodocia, becoming abruptly aware of her hairless state and grotesque garments, went too, in haste, driving before her a sleepy lagging Rosemary. Richmond and Jael were left with their son, who slept soundly, one hand tucked under his small placid face.

"Thank God," said Richmond, and "I wish I'd been here, Blossoms. You must have had an awful hour."

Jael clutched him with dry burning hands. "It was my fault," she said. "I did the most dreadful thing." The voice failed in her parched throat.

"Tell me," Richmond said.

She looked at him. "When you had gone I hated you," she

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said simply. "I came in here and looked at David and hated him too—because, oh Richmond—because he was your son. I—my wickedness—it frightened him."

"Nonsense," Richmond said gently.

"It's true," Jael whispered. "You—you can see that it is."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Go to bed," he said tenderly. "I'll watch your little boy for you. Go now, Blossoms."

He put his arm round her and urged her gently towards the door. She went docilely enough.

"Will you wake me before David wakes?"

He promised, and held her close for a moment, looking down into the troubled eyes. "Sweet," he whispered, "don't think foolish things of yourself." He lifted her hands and kissed them. . . .

Richmond watched his son. He fed the fire with small logs and sat drowsing by David's bed, half asleep and half idly gazing at the absurd smiling lion and wreathed unicorn he had painted on its narrow foot for a fascinated little boy. He felt weak and utterly weary, but his mind was clear and held among quiet thoughts.

For the first time since Paul's death he saw him not as in the monstrous horror of his end, but in his habit as he lived. Paul on leave, with splendid breeches just not white, gold wristlet and gold identification disc—an exquisite Paul, lean and brown, with a laughing devil in his eyes, in the very tiptop and glory of fresh youth. Paul in Flanders mud. Mud over the top of his beautiful boots, mud on his tunic, mud in his very eyelashes—a gay Paul, a debonair laughing Paul, a golden boy with the heart and tried courage of a man.

Richmond's heart leaped to the vision. He said—"Oh my dear, you've come back." The laughing boy was gone and

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Paul's friend sat alone, with tears in his eyes and a smile hovering on his lips.

The flames leaped and the shadows followed each other down the walls like the shadow of great wings. The wind of their passing filled the empty room. Richmond looked up. The great figure he had made of John Trude took shape before him and changed under his eyes. His knees were on the ground, but his body was flung back, with great muscles straining and throat swelling in the rage of his effort. At the bottom of the sunken eyepits light stirred, and in one vast upflung arm he held a small laughing boy. Richmond glanced sideways at his sleeping son.

The logs had burned to a red smoulder and the shafts of dawn stood at the closed casement.

He drew a gasping breath. A fiery joy filled him to the lips. Beauty had not died with Paul, nor been utterly destroyed in the unpardonable sacrifice of war. For ever beyond his grasp, she kept her immemorial home. Beauty of body perished and beauty of mind decayed, and the man who served them only, as Richmond at hot nineteen had wished to serve, chased shadows void of breath.

Richmond flung up his head with a queer sense of triumph. Now he understood. Beauty eludes mortal man. They suffer, but life, even poor mortal life, is more than its suffering. He saw that men do not live to attain beauty unattainable, nor to find harmony in a distracting universe—bitter as death in the belly these quests are and will be—but because they have some time desired to live. There is the undying fire. There the dream and the vision. In pain and blood the flame flickers unquenched. To it is the service of man and of his right hand, and of his mind hedged in with blackness and the spears of thought, and of his pitying soul.

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Men have always prayed—*Lord have mercy upon us.* They should have prayed—Man, have mercy. . . . He saw that the cruelty of God is as nothing to the cruelty of Man.

And yet men like to be kind. Richmond tried to think of any person he had known who did not sometimes wish to be kind. Even John Trude was often kind.

Came a rushing sense of freedom. He was free. Effortless tides of life and strength were pouring into him. He saw, pitifully, that his freedom had come through the crucified body of Jael.

The wages of sin *is* death.

He was done with lies. He was free.

He knew now that there was only one faith for him, and one love. He had always known it. Most clear in his thoughts was a March morning when, round a bend in the path, he came suddenly upon Jael. He had known it then. He had known it when she stood in tranced beauty to receive her first kisses from him. But then the colours of the picture had been dim and changing, like the gorgeous colours of a dream that fade and glow and fade again. They were very clear and distinct now.

He looked at the son of his body, miraculously brought back to him out of strange peril, and thought of his wife's love shining through her pain, and of the hopes and courage given back to him past all expectation, and his heart swelled with thankfulness.

Not to all men is a chance given twice. Richmond swore humbly and fervently that he would do nothing to spoil this chance.

He stood up and tucked the clothes closely round his son and then, moving quietly, flung the casement wide. Daylight, stepping sedately in dawn's flaming steps, came up and filled the sky. Still David slept. Richmond touched the fair head with caressing fingers. The night was over and the valley of

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the shadow of death lay behind, its darkness turned into morning.

He went softly to Jael's room.

She woke to find him kneeling beside the bed with his head close to hers on the pillow.

She sat up swiftly, a question in her eyes.

"He's sleeping, and rosy and warm, my dear," Richmond said. "You needn't rush away to him. Your other boy needs looking after infinitely more."

He curled up beside her with an arm round her slender waist and his head on her smooth shoulder.

"You think as much of me as of the other one, I hope?"

She did not answer and he twisted his head back to look at her. "Tell me, Jael," he persisted absurdly. "You never tell me any nice things."

She flushed at that and said—"There's always been three of you, Richmond. A friend and"—she faltered—"a dear lover, and a boy that came to me for comfort." She paused. "He didn't come often, and I think perhaps he was never really there. You're so much better than I am, Richmond."

He thought he had never seen a more happy radiance on her face. It shone in her as if the fire through which she had passed was making more manifest her indwelling loveliness. The gracious ways of her body were fashioned to a rare grace. A strange longing possessed him until he could have worshipped this slender girl whose eyes were windows to her loving soul. The curve of her small maidenly breasts beneath her gown roused in him an awed passion of tenderness that brought him very near to tears.

He sat up and said queerly—"You'll never hate me again, Jael? I couldn't bear it if you did."

"No," she said, "oh no, Richmond," and tried to draw him into her arms again. He shook his head.

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"No, listen, Jael. There *is* a boy that you must keep in your heart. He has been grievously unhappy. Darling—I—this thing I did to you. I was never easy in my mind about it. I have never been easy-minded in such things. If I had been, it would not have gone so deep in me, and perhaps never have reached out to hurt you." He paused and said—"Oh my dear, your boy was hurt. He had a sore heart and a mind divided against itself. He—I have been wretched, Jael."

He flung himself across her knees and wept bitterly—warm tears that melted the last icy splinter of unkind pride and swept the last bitterness from his heart. Jael was shaken and filled with a new joy. She did not touch him, or speak, until he lifted himself and caught her with a strange, boyish tenderness. Her eyes did not falter before the light in his. She began to murmur words so gentle and intimate that he was filled with a hushed reverence, hearing them. He held his breath and bowed his face to the hands folded on her breast.

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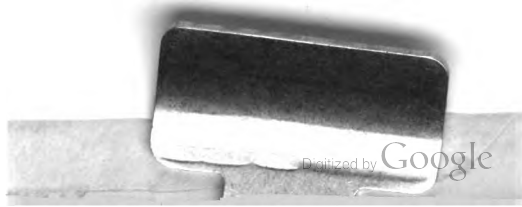

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